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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Thematic Evolution in Ola Rotimi's Plays: 1966-1984.

By

Tamrat Gebeyehu

C

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 1993

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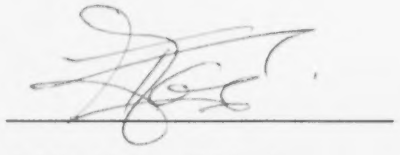

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Carl Hare

Stephen Arnold

Jan Selman

George Lang

3 September 1993

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a thematic study of the plays by Ola Rotimi, a Nigerian playwright, theatre practitioner and scholar. It argues that Rotimi's themes have evolved in three stages. It also holds that the evolution of Rotimi's thematic concerns is the outcome and reflection of: Nigeria's post-independence socio-political situations, the change in composition and expectation of the Nigerian audience, and of Rotimi's own development as an artist.

The study describes and analyzes Rotimi's major thematic concerns from 1966 to 1984, focusing on the three plays written during this period. The analysis identifies the shifts in Rotimi's thematic concerns and the factors which brought these changes. The general pattern of Rotimi's thematic evolution is explored through the investigation of the development of the central theme in Rotimi's theatre: leadership.

The thesis is composed of five chapters. Chapter One establishes the socio-political and artistic contexts of Rotimi's plays and includes a survey of Rotimi's own vision of the purpose of the theatre and the role of the dramatist. Chapters Two, Three and Four examine the major themes in Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again, Ovonramwen Nogbaisi and Hopes of the Living Dead respectively. Chapter Five concludes the thesis by summarizing and analyzing the general pattern of the evolution of Rotimi's thematic concerns and by relating this to Rotimi's search for form.

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INTRODUCTION

Ola Rotimi is one of the most prominent playwrights of Nigeria. He is also one of his country's most eminent directors and theatre scholars. He was born of Yoruba and Ijo parents in 1938 and attended schools both in eastern and western Nigeria (significant factors for his committed stance against tribalism). From 1959 to 1966 he studied in the United States where he earned his B.A. in Play Directing and his M.F.A. in Play Writing from Boston and Yale Universities respectively. Although he had already begun to write before he left Nigeria, it was during his stay in the U.S. that he established himself as a playwright. In 1963 his first full-length play, To Stir the God of Iron, was produced at the Boston University Drama School, and three years later his next play, Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again, was performed at Yale University, where it was named the major play of the year.[1]

Upon his return from the U.S. to Nigeria, Rotimi took a research fellow position at the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ife, where he did extensive research on Nigeria's different ethnic groups' traditions. It was during this period that he published his two most popular critical essays on indigenous Nigerian/African theatre: "The Drama in African Ritual Display" and "Traditional Nigerian Drama".[2] While he was at Ife, Rotimi combined his scholarly research with his artistic endeavours and began his experiment to create a genuine Nigerian/African theatre both in form and in content. Almost all of Rotimi's plays of this period are the result of this experiment. During this period Rotimi also formed the Ori-Olokun Players at the University of Ife, a theatre company which became the only professional English-speaking theatre troupe in Nigeria for a long time. Yemi Ogunbiyi, while stressing the significance of Ori-Olokun players in understanding the nature of Rotimi's theatre, pointed out the uniqueness of this theatre company:

> Its [Ori-Olokun theatre company's] uniqueness lay in the ideology underlying its objectives, as reflected in its membership, a membership drawn from all walks of life and all classes of society, a membership which affirmed the notion that the struggle for a meaningful cultural liberation is not the exclusive concern of any one select group in society, but rather that of all. In the hands of Ola Rotimi, Ori-Olokun became a real experimental theatre, providing the much needed meeting-point between the traditional artists and the university trained mind.[3]

Most of Rotimi's plays at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies were written for this company. In 1975 Rotimi left Ife for Port Harcourt to head the Department of Creative Arts at the University, where he continued to write and direct plays until recently.

Rotimi has at least twelve plays to his credit: seven published ones--Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again (1966), The Gods Are Not to Blame (1968), Kurunmi: An Historical Tragedy (1969), Holding Talks: An Absurdist drama (1970), Ovonramwen Nogbaisi (1971), If...The Tragedy of the Ruled (1979), and Hopes of the Living Dead (1984); and four unpublished ones--To stir the God of

Iron (produced in 1963), Cast the First Stone (produced in 1967), The Prodigal (dance-drama, produced in 1969), Akasa Youmi (produced in 1977), and Everyone His/Her Own Problem (broadcast on BBC Radio in 1987).

Rotimi's plays comment on post-independence Nigerian history, and they also reflect the aspirations, difficulties and struggles of Nigerian/African society. Their major themes have relevance not only to today's Nigeria but also to other African countries, including Ethiopia. Yet these plays have not been comprehensively studied outside Nigeria mainly because, as Martin Banham remarked, "Rotimi lives somewhat in the shadow of his fellow Nigerian dramatist, the Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka."[4] Even where Rotimi's theatre has been discussed, his plays have attracted surprisingly little comment on their thematic content.[5] The purpose of this study is to explore this least-discussed area of Rotimi's theatre. It will investigate the most recurring themes in Rotimi's plays, their evolution, and the circumstances that surround this evolution; and it will hopefully contribute to more comprehensive studies of both Rotimi's theatre and of the changing thematic concerns of post-independence African playwrights.

I begin this study with a survey of the socio-political and artistic context of Rotimi's plays. Thus, in Chapter One I will briefly look at Nigeria's post-independence history and the development of its contemporary drama in English. In order to understand the aesthetic foundation of Rotimi's themes, I also briefly look at Rotimi's view of the purpose of the theatre and the role of the dramatist.

I have divided Rotimi's works in the same way as the playwright divided them: into three periods.[6] In Chapter Two, I will discuss Rotimi's thematic concern in the First Period, the beginning of his career. Because this period coincides with civilian rule in Nigeria (1960-66), the discussion is also an examination of Rotimi's response to the situations under the Nigerian First Republic. In this chapter I will exclusively focus on Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again (1966) because other Rotimi's plays of this period are not available in print.

In Chapter Three, focusing on Ovonramwen Nogbaisi (1971), I will discuss Rotimi's main thematic focus under the period of military rule in Nigeria. This discussion will also be a thematic exploration of the second stage, the experimentation stage, of Rotimi's theatre. In Chapter Four, again focusing on one of the major plays of the period, Hopes of the Living Dead (1984), I will examine Rotimi's responses to Nigeria's socio-political situations at the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties. In this chapter I will also examine the shift in Rotimi's thematic concern which became apparent in the third stage of his career. In Chapter Five, I will summarize Rotimi's main thematic focus from the beginning of his career until the early eighties. I also discuss the stages in the thematic development of Rotimi's theatre. And after examining the evolution of one of the most recurring themes of Rotimi's plays, I will present my conclusions about Rotimi's overall thematic concerns and their evolution.

CHAPTER ONE

I. Socio-political changes in post-independence Nigeria.

i. Political Changes

In its thirty-two years of history, Nigeria has experienced all of those ills that have plagued post-independence Africa: ethnic strife, civil war, successive military coups and countercoups. The country has also suffered from unprecedented official corruption and economic mismanagement. As most scholars explain it, some of these problems are a direct consequence of colonial rule in Nigeria.[7] Therefore, to understand the post-independence political and social realities of Nigeria, we need to look briefly at some of the situations created there by colonial rule.

The major factor responsible for most of the country's post-independence problems, especially for its political instability, is the nature of the country's formation. Nigeria, like most countries in Africa, was created by colonizers at the height of "the scramble for Africa". The British, competing with the French who colonized most of West Africa, carved out a huge block of territory to form the largest colony in the region. This region is located at the meeting point of the trans-continental migration routes[8] and is populated by many of the native races of Africa.[9] Consequently, British colonial conquest resulted not only in creating one of the most ethnically diverse nations in Africa but also in bringing together "people with cultures, histories and languages as different from each other as those of Britain and China."[10] Today over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups are found in Nigeria, of which ten account for approximately nine-tenths of the total population.

British colonialism not only brought these ethnic groups together but also shaped their identities and their future relationships. Gavin Williams asserts that tribalism, which was responsible for most problems in the post-independence Nigeria, was taking shape during colonial era:

> Before colonial rule the people of what is now Nigeria generally defined their social and political identities by their social status and their inclusion in a particular state or local community, not by any wider "tribal" classification. In the early colonial period these identities were fixed by the boundaries of the native authorities and the authorities of the "Chiefs" over their subjects. With increased mobility and the breaking of ties with local communities, new "tribal" identities were formed, based on the membership of much larger language groups.[11]

Because Nigeria's ethnic groups had never been incorporated into one single political entity before colonialism, one could say that the Nigerian nation as such was the imposition of colonizers. It was in the absence of organically evolved national feeling that the nation was created.[12] This colonial legacy, namely the absence of common national interest, became another major cause of instability in post-independence Nigeria:

> It seems unfair that Nigerians have thus far got the governments they deserve, but it is not unfair to say that the instability and ineffectiveness of the national government derives partly from social tendencies that inhibit the emergence of decisive and legitimate national leadership. Apart from human venality, however serious, Nigerian leaders have made poor defenders of the national interest because Nigeria as an idea remains tenuous and deficient....The tragedy of Nigeria is that it is incorporated as a national unit in the absence of a commitment to a national good.[13]

The structure of the colonial states also created conditions for the post-independence problems.[14] Before 1914, there were two British protectorates where present-day Nigeria is found: The Northern and the Southern Protectorates. The boundaries between these protectorates and their subordinate constituencies were fixed arbitrarily by colonizers. After independence these colonial boundaries became a bone of contention among the major ethnic groups, namely the Hausa, the Yoruba and Ibo.[15]In addition, this colonial heritage left the minorities with only one hope: to seek patronage from the ruling political party of the region, in other words, from the dominant ethnic group of the region.[16] To solve these problems, successive governments have revised the division of the country; therefore, toward the end of the eighties, the three regions which made up Nigeria at the time of independence became twenty-one states.

The policy differences which existed between the Northern and Southern protectorates also contributed to post-independence political problems. As is typical in their colonies, the British chose a policy of indirect rule, and this formed the basis for colonial administration in both protectorates. However, this policy was implemented differently in each protectorate:

> In the Moslem emirates in the North, the British simply took control over appointments and sent urban office-holders to administer the subordinate districts. In the west they transformed the institutions of the nobility to fit their needs, raising rulers who had been first among equals to authority over their peers, and applying a system of patronage to titled officers. In the East, where no similar indigenous nobility existed, they appointed intermediaries without noble status, in some cases even strangers to the area, as chiefs by "warrant".[17]

As with the administrative policies, different religious and educational schemes were followed in each of the protectorates. In the Muslim-dominated North, missionary activities were restricted, and the responsibility of education was in the hands of the colonial administration. However, the administration did little to introduce modern education. On the other hand, the missionaries had every access in the South, and education was also left in their hands. Thus, they expanded educational facilities in the South as part of their evangelical activities. These policy differences left behind different administrative concepts between North and South, set conditions for future religious strife, and above all, created educational imbalance between Northern and Southern Nigeria.[18]

With these and other colonial legacies in the background, Nigeria became

independent on October 1, 1960, and adopted a political system which was no less than a continuation of the structure of colonial rule. The First Nigerian Republic was fashioned after the British type of parliamentary democracy. However, this Republic did not last long because a national consensus, which is a prerequisite for a parliamentary type of democracy, did not exist at that time.[19] It was not only this faulty political experiment but also the politics of ethnicity and corruption that caused the fall of the First Nigerian Republic. Ethnicity was an issue to which the masses were very sensitive, and so most politicians used this fact to win the support of particular ethnic groups without committing themselves to major social changes.[20] In addition, these politicians, who had no more allegiance to the people than did the imperialist rulers, saw their political power not as responsibility to the public, but as a once-in-a-lifetime chance to achieve personal prosperity.[21] They used their political power to amass wealth for themselves, to reward their supporters and to punish their opponents by denying them economic opportunity.[22]

These political problems derived from the heritage of colonialism took little time to create instability in the country. Two years after independence, a major political crisis developed in western Nigeria which was followed by the break-down of law and order in the area. A year later, census figures sparked hostility between the less Europeanized numerical majority of the North and the more technologically advanced people of the South. In 1965, the government in the West fell, and violence broke out again. However, the federal government, which was itself at the brink of collapse, was unable to stem this violence. By the end of the year, the political situations of the First Republic reached the point of no return, and in January 1966, a group of young Ibo army officers overthrew the government. However, soon they were forced to surrender, and Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, who was himself an Ibo, took over power.

The January coup and countercoup did not improve the political situation in the country; they rather worsened it and indirectly led Nigeria toward a civil war. Although the leaders of the January coup claimed that they were determined to wipe out corruption and put an end to tribal politics, their execution of mostly non-Ibo politicians and high-ranking officers severely damaged the already strained relationship between Northern and Southern Nigeria.[23] In addition, General Ironsi's decision to abolish the federal regions and to form a unitary government made the Northerners more hostile to Southerners. They felt that the abolishing of the regions and the formation of a unitary government would lead to their being dominated by the better qualified Southerners.[24] Hence, many Northerners demonstrated against the unification decree and even raised the idea of secession. Urban mob violence erupted in several Northern cities, and many Southerners, especially Ibo, were attacked. The Northern troops also avenged the death of their fellow officers in the January coup by executing Ibo officers, including General Ironsi. Later, arrangements were made to keep the country together, and as an appeasement to the Northerners, L/Colonel Yokubu Gowon (later General), the only surviving Northern senior officer, was made the head of

state. When Gowon assumed power, he proposed creating twelve states out of the four regions, but this was unacceptable to easterners, especially to the Ibo; they felt that it was a plan designed to weaken them and to take control of the region where a large quantity of oil had recently been discovered. In a parallel development, thousands of Ibo who were settled in the Northern cities were massacred, and the federal government did nothing to bring to justice those who were responsible for these atrocities. All these developments created in most Ibo a strong desire for secession. Consequently, as soon as the federal military government announced the creation of the twelve states, the military governor of the eastern region announced the secession of "The Republic of Biafra", and two months later Nigeria entered into a civil war that lasted over two years.

The civil war was primarily the outcome of those colonial legacies which were discussed earlier. However, this does not explain fully the cause of the war. The problem also needs to be addressed from the perspectives of political leadership. The political leaders, who merely replaced the colonial rulers, were also responsible for this tragedy. It was their lack of insight, their inability to compromise and even their egocentric nature that doomed Nigeria to a bloody war.[25] In a recent interview, Ojukwu, the leader of the Biafran secessionist movement, hinting at the personal rivalry which existed between him and the head of state, said: "I'm one of the few officers that the Nigerian Army has produced that has never served under an officer junior to him."[26]

In January 1970, the war ended with the "Biafrans'" unconditional surrender, and political stability prevailed over Nigeria.[27] However, five years later this stability reached the brink of collapse. This time the crisis was brought about by glaring social inequalities and rampant corruption. General Gowon's decision to postpone the date for the transition to civilian rule worsened this political crisis; however, the crisis was resolved peacefully. General Gowon was removed from his post in a bloodless coup and was replaced by B/General Murtala Muhammad.

General Muhammad, a Northerner, ruled Nigeria for less than a year, but during this period he managed to bring back solid discipline both in the government and in the society.[28] He also took several measures to guarantee political stability in Nigeria. He outlined the process of transition to civilian rule, and to ensure the fair representation of minorities in the future civilian government he increased the number of states by seven. He also announced his plan to demobilize part of the army, which was the legacy of the civil war. However, this later plan, together with his support for a probe into widespread government corruption, cost him his life.[29]

General Muhammad was assassinated in the February 1976 abortive coup and was replaced by his fellow officer, General Olusegun Obasanjo, an Ibo. The new head of state continued to implement Muhammad's reform plan; therefore, in 1978, Obasanjo's government adopted a new constitution and terminated the twelve-year-old state of emergency. A year later, Nigeria returned to a civilian rule under the presidency of Alhaji Shehu Shagari and became a republic for a

second time.

The Second Republic, like the first, was a political experiment, but this time the experiment was based upon concrete Nigerian experience:[30] it enshrined the idea of consensus government.[31] Nonetheless, the political elites failed to adhere to this basic idea; as a result, intense partisanship and intolerance re-emerged on the Nigerian political scene.[32] The split between the political elite, together with the widespread corruption, brought back political instability to the country. The political crisis was exacerbated by the decline of the oil revenues and resulted in the collapse of civilian rule for the second time. In 1984, Major General Muhammad Buhari overthrew President Shagari's government, which had managed to return to power through political manipulation, in 1983. Immediately after the overthrow of Shagari, General Buhari launched a "war against indiscipline" and reintroduced the death penalty.[33] However, in 1985, he was deposed by his own Supreme Military Council for alleged political repression and was replaced by the current president, Major General Ibrahim Babangida.

Currently, Nigeria stands at the threshold of the Third Republic. However, the political situation in the country is still far from being stable. The volatile nature of Nigerian politics is closely connected with the country's economic and social conditions. In the following section we will discuss the major post-independence economic and social changes and briefly examine the problems which arose from these changes.

ii. Economic and Social changes

The oil-boom of the seventies was the major post-independence economic factor that greatly affected Nigerian society. The huge revenue from the export of oil helped the country to recover quickly from the war and to launch large and extensive economic projects. In addition, this economic factor enabled the country to implement various social and cultural programs. A Universal Primary Education Program was introduced, and many universities and institutions of higher learning were also opened during this time. The cultural revival, which was thwarted by the war, gained momentum; the country also hosted several international cultural events including The Second Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture.

However, the fast economic growth of the seventies did not change the neo-colonial nature of the economy; rather, it strengthened it. The economy was mainly focused on the export of oil, and the agricultural sector was neglected.[34] The consequence of this faulty economic policy was twofold: first, it forced many farmers to migrate to the urban areas; second, it made the country completely dependent on imported food.[35] The same is true of the industrialization of the country; most of the industries which were established during this period were dependent on imported raw materials and half-finished products, and as the country's foreign reserves dwindled, these industries came to a standstill. Thus, in the eighties, with the sharp decline of world oil prices, the whole Nigerian

economy came close to total collapse. As the late chief Awolwo, a Nigerian veteran politician, observed: "although the nation had achieved rapid economic growth, it had gained little economic development."[36]

Nonetheless, the economic growth of the seventies, like the civil war before it, brought many changes into the social sphere. Before discussing these changes, we will look briefly at one of the major social outcomes of the civil war, namely the emergence of strong national feeling. Although the war had claimed millions of lives and had caused great destruction, ironically, Nigerian society emerged from the war with a much greater feeling of nationalism.[37] This national feeling arose out of concerted efforts to preserve the unity of the country. In addition, the mutual distrust between ethnic groups, which led to the civil war, was dispelled by the positive actions of the public toward the defeated side. The Ibo, who were senselessly slaughtered before they took up arms to defend their rights, were not massacred after their defeat.[38]

In addition to these public actions, other measures undertaken by the federal government after the war had helped to create cohesion in the society. Among these measures, the most important one was the mandatory national service programme. According to this programme, young Nigerian graduates were required to serve for a limited period of time in one part of the country other than their place of birth. This helped to bring the Nigerian people closer and to understand each other.[39]

Although all the above-discussed factors contributed significantly to the decline of tribalism and regionalism, it was the economic conditions which most dramatically altered the pattern of relationships in Nigeria. In addition to the oil boom, the indigenization decree of the seventies, which forced foreign-owned companies to sell shares to Nigerians, created conditions for those Nigerians who were already prosperous, to become more so. These economic factors deepened the class differences in the society and precipitated a strong, class-based, social relationship. Parallel to the emergence of a huge working-class population, an affluent upper-middle class emerged and became politically dominant. As Whitaker stated:

> The phenomenal rise of the affluent in the urban areas and their disproportionately increasing political influence have created a socio-economic situation in which the peasants in the rural area and the urban working classes have became increasingly impoverished and marginalised.[40]

Thus, in the seventies, tribal affinities had less meaning in the public and private affairs of many Nigerians than class differences.

The civil war and the fast economic growth created other social problems. After the civil war, Nigeria was engulfed in a wave of armed robbery, and aiming to curb this problem, the military government established tribunals to try anyone who was accused of armed robbery. Those who were found guilty were executed publicly at the various centres throughout the country, and many at the Bar Beach near the capital. These public executions had two social consequences: first, they

created insensitivity on the part of the public to victims of accidents and other misfortunes.[41] Secondly, since the death sentence was given to armed robbers who stole money from individuals, whereas public officials who misappropriated public funds received lighter sentences, this increased public skepticism with regard to the legal system.[42]

The other major social problem resulting from the post-war economic conditions was wide-spread corruption of officials. The sudden rush of multinational oil and other business firms into Nigeria, and their need for on-the-scene connections, provided opportunities for many officials to amass wealth through commissions and other forms of corruption. This social evil was not confined to the higher levels of the government; rather, it became a code of conduct at all levels of management and even entered the area of personal relationships: "The corrupt informal pattern of relationships in the formal structure of the offices extended beyond the office walls into society at large and became the accepted norm of behaviour."[43]

Generally, the post-civil war economic conditions brought a new morality which was characterized by loss of sense of duty, undiscipline and cynicism. To understand the social conditions of the post-civil war period, it suffices to look at Wole Soyinka's description:

> The post-civil war period after an initial period of uncertainty--two or three years at the most--has witnessed Nigeria's self-engorgement at the banquet of highway robberies, public executions, public flogging and other institutionalised sadism, arson, individual and mass megalomania, racketeering, hoarding, epidemic road-abuse and reckless slaughter, exhibitionism-- private and institutional--callous and contemptuous ostentation, casual cruelties, wanton destructions, slummification, Nairamania, and its attendant atavism (ritual murder for wealth), an orgy of physical filth, champagne, usury, gadgetry, blood...the near collapse of human communication.[44]

Currently, Nigeria, in addition to the social consequences of the oil-boom economy, is facing religious strife as the result of the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in Northern Nigeria. Looking at its geographical proximity, one could say that this religious hostility is a reminder of the pre-civil war ethnic strife. However, it is rather a manifestation of the deepening of the socio-economic and political crisis in the country. In the next section, we will attempt to look at the implications of this and other post-independence socio-political problems for Nigeria's dramatists.

iii. The situation for the dramatist

The need to free society from its colonial heritage has been the major challenge in post-independence Nigeria. It is this challenge which forms the background for the dramatist. The central task of the dramatist in this situation is defining national identity. This task was more urgent in the early years of

independence, as the country was attempting to assert its native heritage and prove that it would be able to survive without the patronage of the colonialists. In the seventies, the task of the dramatist with regard to the national identity took another turn. At that time, the official policy of the government was to promote Nigeria as a wealthy nation. This policy, which was based solely on yet uncertain new-found oil revenue, ignored the continued poverty of the masses.[45] Now the dramatist was faced with a challenge which required him to define the true identity of the country in terms of social reality.

The need to create a stable political system and a just society has been another condition which the dramatists have had to address in their work. This situation is closely connected with the problem of leadership. To this point in our discussion, we have attempted to present most of the post-independence problems in light of Nigeria's colonial legacy. However, to put all blame on colonialism is no less than a search for an scapegoat. One of Nigeria's major problems, like most African countries, has been the lack of sound leadership. To explain this, it is sufficient to mention the oil-boom of the seventies as example. The oil boom provided Nigeria with material means which could have been used to build a self-sustaining economy. However, because of lack of sensible leadership, the country failed to overcome economic dependency and plunged into the black hole of foreign debt. Thus, the question of leadership is of paramount importance for the dramatist.

These are some of the major challenges which post-independence socio-political changes presented to the dramatist. Nigerian playwrights have addressed these problems in their work from different perspectives and in different manners. A detailed examination of the dramatists' exploration of these problems is beyond the scope of this discussion. However, in the following section, while outlining the development of Nigerian drama, I will attempt to look at the two major approaches to these problems.

II. Contemporary Nigerian Drama in English.

As Yemi Ogunbiyi explained it, the beginning[46] of contemporary Nigerian drama in English coincides with Nigerian independence.[47] The euphoria of freedom and the desire for cultural revival created conditions for many young Nigerians, who also were conscious of western dramatic models and dramatic technique, to exercise their craft. This period was dominated by such playwrights as J. P. Clark, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Zulu Sofola and Wale Ogunyemi.

Most dramatists of this period were primarily concerned with defining the national identity and asserting Nigerian/African values.[48] Therefore, they based most of their work on the country's traditions, myths and history. They also blended their work with elements of indigenous art such as songs, dances, masks, proverbs and sayings. These playwrights were simultaneously celebrating Nigerian values and raising the Nigerian awareness of the corrupt practices of the

politicians. Some of them were sending signals to the people about the impending danger looming over the society. For example, ethnic strife and the resulting Nigerian Civil War were predicted in the works of playwrights such as Soyinka. When these conditions materialized in the late sixties, dramatists strove to find solutions to these problems through their work.

Thus, the search for peace and harmony was the dominant theme which most concerned these dramatists.[49] They primarily used individual heroes as the vehicles of this search, and the solutions their characters sought were mainly metaphysical. Therefore, this persistent concern with individual heroes and metaphysical solutions exposed the dramatist to attacks such as the following:

> Even for social problems of a practical and tangible nature, the dramatists seek solution [sic] in [sic] non-tangible supersensible arena [sic]..., they are generally existentialist in their search for formal excellence, sometimes even to the detriment of content. These works [The Gods Are not to Blame by Rotimi; Song of a Goat, The Raft, The Masquerade by Clark and works by Soyinka] are mainly elitist in outlook with an avid potential of alienating the majority of society's populace.[50]

Nigerian contemporary drama entered its second stage after the civil war with the emergence of a new generation of playwrights. Among them, Fela Davis, Kole Omotoso, Tess Onwueme, Bode Sowande and Femi Osofisan are the most prominent. They were set apart from the first generation of dramatists "by a temperament and vision, hardened, as it were, by the wounds and trauma of the Nigerian civil war".[51] In addition, the vision of these dramatists was also shaped by the post-civil-war political and social conditions. Thus, in contrast to the first generation, these playwrights have followed a different approach in the analysis of their society:

> The emergent group, mainly comprising the "young" generation of dramatists, seeks to break down societal problems in the light of real historical occurrences. Their ideology is materialist in description and perception and dialectical in approach. As far as they are concerned, man's problem[s] originate from man and not from the metaphysical realm or from the gods. Only man, then, can by himself find solutions to his problems. For an end to societal ills, they proffer, as solution, a restructuring of society....[52]

These second-generation playwrights, like their predecessors, based most of their work on Nigerian tradition, myth and history. However, their approach to these factors were entirely different from that of the first generation.[53] They "deconstructed" their materials to communicate their revolutionary ideas. Femi Osofisan's Morountodun is a good example. In this play Osofisan used the myth of Moremi, a legendary queen who let herself be captured by the enemy in order to bring victory to the Yoruba empire. The main character of the play, Titubi, who believes in the ideology of the ruling class and dreams of being a latter-day Moremi, decides to infiltrate the 1969 peasant uprising so that she could hasten its fall. In the end, however, she realizes her error and abandons both Moremi's myth

and her subversive plan and adopts the peasants' cause.

The fact that the central character of Morountodun is a woman is not an accident. In contrast to the older generation of dramatists, the second generation are more concerned with gender issues, and there are also prominent feminist playwrights among them.[54] As was noted earlier, most of the second-generation playwrights were eager to provide practical solutions to social problems through their works. In this respect, as we will see later in Rotimi's works, some dramatists from the first generation have also attempted to suggest social solutions in their recent works.

Currently, contemporary Nigerian drama is facing two major problems. The first problem is overcoming the language barrier and finding forms which enable wider communication with the society. To resolve this problem most dramatists from both generations have incorporated everyday expressions and used "pidgin English" in their work. They have even made attempts to translate their works into indigenous languages. Despite these attempts, this problem remains a dilemma for the contemporary Nigerian playwrights.[55]

The second major problem in contemporary Nigerian drama is to identify the approach which will be relevant to the social and political conditions of the country. The second generation of dramatists have used Marxist ideology in Nigerian drama. However, given the recent crisis in Marxist ideology, it remains to be seen whether or not their approach will continue to be credible to the masses.

III. Rotimi's View of the Purpose of the Theatre and the Role of the Dramatist in the Context of Other Nigerian Playwrights' Views.

Every playwright, whether implicitly or explicitly, holds certain views about his role in the society and sees the function of his art from a certain perspective. One playwright may view his role from a purely aesthetic angle, seeing his craft as an exclusively personal act which is devoid of any immediate social function. Another playwright may see his art as serving a social function, envisaging his craft as a means of enlightening society or arousing its spirit to purposeful action.

Rotimi has seen both the dramatist's role and the purpose of the theatre from a socially functional perspective. He believes that the artist's role in society is to make the audience reflect upon, and respond to, certain socio-political issues. Therefore, he strongly believes that the artist's work should have social relevance. Rotimi expressed this view in one of his early interviews:

> I think every writer--whether a dramatist, novelist or poet--should have some commitment to his society. It is not enough to entertain; the writer must try to excite people into thinking or reacting to the situations he is striving to hold up to them in his drama or narrative. I think there must always be some social relevance in what one presents.[56]

Rotimi's view, especially on the question of social relevance, is shared by

Soyinka, though he insists that his major concern is to provide excellent theatre:

> When the writer in his own society can no longer function as conscience, he must recognize that his choice lies between denying himself totally or withdrawing to the position of chronicler and post-mortem surgeon.... The artist has always functioned in African society as the record of the mores and expression of his society *and* as the voice of vision in his own time. It is time for him to respond to this essence of himself.[57]

Rotimi's view also coincides with that of the general Nigerian society's view of the role of the artist. As Awam Amkpa explains it, the artist in Nigerian society is always expected not only to entertain but also to make a certain social and political statement with his art:

> Unlike the western frame of reference...we see culture and politics as integral....It is the history of art in our culture, even before colonial times. It became more obvious when Nigeria encountered colonialism. It became more urgent for art to reflect the bitterness about being colonized, the bitterness about being enslaved and so on. So in Nigeria you notice that people use that as a criterion to judge how good a playwright is.... So you notice [that] when people are talking about Femi Osofisan, Soyinka or Ola Rotimi, [they] keep talking about..."well it was wonderful play but what about the political message"....[58]

The socio-political changes of recent years have caused Rotimi to modify his previous view. In his 1983 collection of interviews, lectures and articles, he described the artist as a social commentator who believes in the actualization of the ideal man and ideal spirit in this world provided that people listen and act.[59] In contrast to his earlier views, here Rotimi defines the tasks of the modern artist from a class-oriented perspective:

> The role of the artist has changed through the ages. From the Artist/Chief priest whose social advocacy was total subservience of man to the supernatural gods; through the singer/court jester who swiped at the fatuity of earthly gods personified in Kings and Chieftains; to the modern artist who must examine the establishmentarian gods who dominate the polity of his world.[60]

Rotimi prescribes almost the same role to the dramatist as the second-generation playwrights. Since most dramatists of the second generation show a special commitment to the Marxist ideology, they see both the function of art and the role of the dramatist from a class perspective. For instance, Femi Osofisan, one of the most prominent of these dramatists, demanded that art be "a social force, an ideological weapon." According to him, the artist's primary duty is neither to entertain nor to search for formal excellence, but "to grapple with the reality of his society in any meaningful way." [61]

Post-civil war social realities, which caused Rotimi to modify his views, were also reflected in a change in the composition and background of Rotimi's audience. Before discussing this point, we need to look at Rotimi's general concept of his audience. In one of his interviews he said:

> Inevitably, I write for audiences who are knowledgeable in this [English] language. However, in handling the English language in my plays, I strive to temper its phraseology to the ear of both the dominant semi-literate as well as the literate classes, ensuring that my dialogue reaches out to both groups with ease in assimilation and clarity and identification.[62]

Rotimi sees his potential audience among the intellectual elite, civil servants and to some extent members of the working class. These social groups were increasingly marginalised and impoverished by the affluent class. In addition, the expansion of higher learning resulted in bringing many young people with a poor peasant and working- class background into intellectual circles. These two socially related changes created an audience which demanded a class-based analysis of the society. Thus, the change in the audience's expectations also contributed to Rotimi's modification of his views.[63]

In this chapter I have attempted to establish the socio-political and artistic framework of Rotimi's plays. Before discussing Rotimi's thematic concerns and their evolution, I would like to summarize some of the points discussed in this chapter. Post-independence Nigerian society has been engaged in a continuous struggle to free itself from its colonial heritage, and its political condition is one of the most volatile in Africa. Economically the society has gone through many changes, going from utter misery, to flashes of wealth, to deep economic crisis. In terms of social relationships, tribalism has given way to class affinity. Similarly, modern Nigerian theatre has also passed through various phases: in the first phase, the theatre was concerned with asserting Nigerian values and criticizing the society, mainly from a metaphysical perspective. In the second phase, the theatre went further to demand the restructuring of the society. These changes are also reflected in Rotimi's aesthetic views: in recent years, he augmented his central view of the dramatist, from the dramatist as enlightener, to the notion of the dramatist as a challenger to the power establishment.

CHAPTER TWO

Rotimi's thematic concerns at the beginning of his career: **Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again.**

Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again, Ola Rotimi's first major play, was premiered at Yale University in 1966. Since it was not published until twelve years later, some differences may exist between the 1966 performance script and its 1977 published version. Lines such as "That is what they did in 1965" hint that Rotimi did some rewriting in the published script, but I believe that this rewriting is minimal and the characters and the plot in the two versions are the same. Besides, as Rotimi himself acknowledged, the basic situation of Our Husband is a reflection of the political atmosphere on the eve of Nigerian independence and that of the First Republic.[64] Thus, the themes in the published version reflect Rotimi's concerns in the early stage of his career. However, it is important to note the similarity between the political situations of the two periods--the period in which the play was written and the period it was published--because these contribute to our understanding of Rotimi's thematic journey. Rotimi wrote this play while he was still in the U.S. He went there a year before Nigerian independence, and to write this play he mainly relied upon his experience of the political atmosphere of the transitional period from British to Nigerian rule. And it was during this transitional period that party politics flourished and most of the post-independence political contradictions set. In 1977, the time the play was published, the same kind of political atmosphere returned to Nigeria as the result of the termination of the twelve years of a state of emergency and the lifting of the ban on the formation of political parties.

Our Husband is a domestic, political comedy which is mainly concerned with the problem of political leadership in the newly independent Nigeria. In this play, Rotimi consciously employs a mildly satirical approach to explore the question of leadership and other themes:

> When I started writing Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again, the ultimate goal was to laugh at...political charlatans of whom there are many in Africa. But the laughter wasn't meant to be acrid. Rather, some degree of understanding--even sympathy was preferred.[65]

In this play, Rotimi explores the leadership theme mainly through the character of Major Rahman Taslim Lejoka-Brown and uses Lejoka-Brown's private life as a fundamental parameter to evaluate his quality as a leader. He shows how a politician who aspires to be a national leader is not even worthy of the responsibility of his house. Lejoka-Brown's own satirical song summarizes this basic point: "Can a pig with so much mess at home,/ Clean up our nation's mess?"[66] The play's setting represents the "mess" in Lejoka-Brown's domestic life:

> ... antiquated walls, cushions here, a couple of drink-stools upturned over there, political posters everywhere, an old matchet dangling warningly up there, a rifle minding its own business over here--all told, a curiously

uncensored picture of well-meaning chaos.... (20)

Lejoka-Brown's chaotic domestic life is partly the result of his lack of integrity. He marries Liza without telling her about his traditional marriage with Mama Rashida. He claims that he did not inform Liza because he felt she might not understand him, but this is hardly the case. He married Sikira after he entered into an apparently monogamous marriage with Liza, and naturally he keeps Liza in the dark. Lejoka-Brown is not only a cheat, he is also a traditional-minded chauvinist. He claims to be a freedom-fighting hero on the national scene, but he sees women as no more than expendable objects. This is especially true of his marriage with Sikira. He married her solely to secure the women's votes through her mother, who is the President of the National Union of Nigerian Market women, and he plans to divorce her after the election. Rotimi redirects Lejoka-Brown's chauvinistic attitude toward the character himself and satirizes him by showing how such an idea could be irritating to him:

Liza: ... Since I hate sharing any personal possession with someone else...

Lejoka-Brown: [*at top of his voice.*] I'm not a possession!

Liza: Please, don't shout!

Lejoka-Brown: So, don't call me a possession, Lady! A-ha--am I a bag of cement? Or... or... do I look like a...a transistor radio? Or...or what do you think I am? A fifty by hundred plot of land on Ikorodu Road? A Volkswagen? Possession indeed! (40)

Rotimi's satire is mainly focused on exposing Lejoka-Brown's crudity as a politician. Lejoka-Brown is a semi-literate retired army officer and a cocoa farmer, but he pretends to be an experienced politician. He challenges his intellectual party colleagues and his western-educated wife for not knowing what politics is: "What do you people know about politics--I mean hard-bone politics?" (52, 56) However, he himself confuses it with war--"Politics means action, and action means war" (52)--and plans to use a military strategy known as "Surprise-and-Attack" in his political campaign. He also expects other party members to accept this plan without discussing it. In this respect it is possible to say that he is a potential military dictator. He even runs his house as one military unit. He has dressed his steward in army Khaki uniform and army boots, and has trained him to salute whenever he "reports." He also treats his wives as if they were subordinates in the Army; thus, it is possible to say that what Sikira defies is not only traditional male chauvinism but that military dictatorship which was approaching the Nigerian national scene at the time: "Do as *You* say, do as you say! It is always do as *you* say. Always command, command, command! Why don't you show some respect and let *me* do as I want, just once!" (57)

Lejoka-Brown's ineffectiveness as a leader is also explored at a

microcosmic level. While he and his deputies are holding a press conference at his house, Liza enters in a bikini. Lejoka-Brown is embarrassed by this, and instead of handling the situation skillfully, he resorts to force. He threatens both his deputies and members of the press with a matchet and gun and forces them to lie flat on their faces so that Liza can pass unobserved. Lejoka-Brown is not only ineffective but also lacks the moral strength to be the nation's leader. He does not have the courage to sacrifice his immediate needs even to fulfil his ambitions. He rejects his friend's advice to live by himself until the election is over, claiming that he can not live without a woman: "I hide myself away for six months--what do you think I am? IMPOTENT?" (11)

Lejoka-Brown is the epitome of those politicians who enter the political arena to fulfil their ambition, rather than to serve the people. Thus, he already has the blueprint of his position in the government and the personal gain he will get out of it. He has assigned himself as the federal Minister of Agriculture and Housing. Although his ambition to take charge of federal Housing Affairs is the result of his anxiety (he seeks this position in order to save his house from being demolished), his dream of being Minister of Agriculture is far more than an expression of his naivety. It indicates his deep-rooted opportunistic motives. Before the oil boom of the seventies, the Nigerian economy was mainly based on the export of such agricultural products as cocoa, and the ministerial position which Lejoka-Brown hopes to assume had implications to farmers such as himself, ranging from facilitating production to price control. Moreover, it is one of the key positions which could be exploited for personal gain. Lejoka-Brown himself unabashedly speaks about his opportunistic motives: "You want to chop a big slice of the National cake?--Na
Politics" (4).

Social prestige is his other reason to go into party politics: "politics is the thing now in Nigeria, mate. You want to be famous? Politics" (4). This is especially crucial to him, for he married a woman more educated and more sophisticated than himself:

> Now, you tell me which is better:
> [*Rises to demonstrate, Master-of-ceremonies fashion.*]
> "Ladies and Gentlemen, I have pleasure in introducing to you this evening, the chairlady of this august occasion..." [*people clap--pra-pra-pra-pra-pra...*]
> "she is the one and only Dr. Mrs Elizabeth Lejoka-Brown, MD, MSc, wife of...
> [*Drops his voice.*]
> ... an Ijebu-Ijesha cocoa farmer!" Now listen to this:
> [*More robust voice.*]
> "... She is the one and only Dr. the Honorable Mrs. Elizabeth Lejoka-Brown, MD (Yale), MSc (Gynecology), wife of the one and only Federal Government Minister of Agriculture and Housing.... (28-29)

While exposing Lejoka-Brown's opportunistic motives, Rotimi at the same time attempts to explain the roots of these misguided ambitions. According to

Rotimi the misplaced motivation of most African politicians is the result of their desperate attempt to free themselves from that poverty in which the whole society is languishing.[67] Although less emphasized, that is what the central character in Our Husband is trying to do: scale the poverty wall.[68] He claims that he has succeeded in making money in cocoa farming, but, as his domestic life reveals, he is not far above the poverty line.

The demands made by dependent members of the extended family is the other factor which makes politicians like Lejoka-Brown desperate. In Our Husband this familial responsibility is suggested by Lejoka-Brown's marriage to Mama Rashida. Mama Rashida was the oldest of Lejoka-Brown's deceased brother's wives, and she is married to him by his father so that she will be supported and taken care of. Along with the familial responsibilities, there are also expectations from the community. In the play this is only implicitly suggested by Lejoka-Brown's promise to his party men, who most probably might be his tribesmen: "Cakes are too soft, Gentlemen. Just you wait! Once We get elected to the top, *wallahi*, we shall stuff ourselves with huge mouthfuls of the National chin-chin" (4).

Generally, Lejoka-Brown is motivated by the same social conditions that compelled politicians of the First Republic to jump onto the arena of politics. Elizabeth Isichei in her A History of Nigeria, explaining the reasons behind the fall of the First Republic, sheds light on some of these conditions:

> Apart from those who, like the Saraduna, belonged to a hereditary aristocracy, most politicians had made a desperate and successful struggle to escape from rural poverty. The frantic accumulation of wealth was meant to build a wall between themselves and poverty, between their children and poverty. And, like their predecessors, the Warrant Chiefs, whom in some ways they resembled, they were expected to be generous, by western standards absurdly generous, to relations, fellow townsmen and constituents. A successful man had to be seen to be successful--to wield power, to display wealth, to spend it freely--or his constituents would begin to wonder if he was really successful at all.[69]

Rotimi, while denouncing the type of political leadership epitomized by the character of Lejoka-Brown, hinted that it is selfless leadership that will deliver the masses from their perpetual misery: "It's amoral, no doubt whatever about that. Amoral and devious, because the misplaced motivation of such politicians deprives the poor majority of relief, through a selfless leadership."[70] However, in Our Husband none of the politicians have this quality. The party intellectuals are no less opportunist than Lejoka-Brown. They even accept his leadership after they learn about his whimsical campaign strategy and his autocratic manner. The other political figure, Sikira, is also far from being a good leader. Throughout the play she is portrayed as a childish, aggressively impudent and prejudiced person. Although she abandons some of her prejudice toward the end of the play, it is difficult to say that she is more rational than at the beginning. Besides, she does not show any qualities, except rebelling against tradition, which might suggest her

potential as a leader. Therefore, her nomination by the party only shows progress from the perspective of women's participation in politics. Otherwise her replacement of Lejoka-Brown does not solve the problem of leadership posed in the play.

Marriage and the relationship between sexes are the other major issues in Our Husband, and as Rotimi himself pointed out, it is this issue that inspired him to write this play first: "... the basic inspiration for Our Husband ... derived from a 'Dear Abbey' letter-column in a local Boston newspaper where a love-lorn woman was seeking advice on how to curb the amorous excesses of her lover."[71] In his exploration of the marriage issue Rotimi addresses pre-arranged marriage, political and to some extent cross-cultural marriages under one enveloping theme: the polygamy theme.

In Nigeria most traditional societies are polygamous, and polygamy is not restricted to the Muslim population. It is practiced among most Christian communities as well. Thus, the polygamy theme in Our Husband is a comment on the traditional marital institutions as a whole. This attitude can also be discerned from the play. Although Lejoka-Brown is a Muslim, he bases all his justification of his polygamous marriage on the indigenous customs. He says that as an African (though this hardly applies to all African societies) he has the right to marry as many wives as he can.

The incompatibility of a polygamous marriage with modern social life is one of the main points which Rotimi attempts to demonstrate in Our Husband. It is with the arrival of the western-educated Liza that Lejoka-Brown's polygamous marriage faces crisis and undergoes a tremendous change. Rotimi also addresses the theme of polygamy in its relation to women's liberation, presenting polygamy as a major social institution that undermines the equality of women. Thus, Rotimi tacitly demands the dismantling of this institution. The fact that the play ends with Liza and Lejoka-Brown alone attests to the play's advocacy of monogamous marriage based on mutual consent, love and understanding regardless of religious, educational or national differences.

As mentioned above, the issue of women's liberation is one of the themes addressed in Our Husband. Rotimi explores this issue in the context of the fundamental rights of all human beings "irrespective of race, sex or creed."[72] However, like the theme of polygamy, he treated this theme carefully because these issues can make the audience uncomfortable, for their attachment to traditional society is strong. He presented the idea of women's liberation in contrast to the chauvinistic attitude of a character with whom the audience could hardly identify. He also presents Liza with a less radical idea of equality of men and women:

> Well, it all goes to prove that Mr Rahman Lejoka-Brown does not have any respect whatsoever for my feelings. Why, I believe a woman must try to be a loving loyal wife and all that. On the other hand, the husband must try to show some respect for the wife and all that. After all, when we boil it down, men and women are all created equal, and unless a husband is ready

to understand.... (56)

Rotimi addresses the issue of the participation of women in politics along with the issue of liberation of women. He shows through Sikira's mother and the members of the National Market Women's Union the determining role women could play in politics if they were conscious of their right and joined forces. The fact that these women are market women implicitly refers to the necessity of women's economic independence for their freedom. This is also suggested by Mama Rashida's chicken-and-egg trade and her final exit.

Cultural dilemma or, as it is referred in many critical works on African theater, "cultural conflict", is another major theme in Our Husband. This theme has been one of the main concerns of most African playwrights, especially during the last decades of colonialism and the first years of independence. Rotimi, while outlining the development of African theater, explains this:

> The next epoch [the preceding epoch is the era of colonialism] marked the collapse of colonialism, with an attendant state of flux caused by an encounter between old and new life-styles. The theme of "cultural conflict" provided the rubric for the treatment of this situation in literature. Under this head, the African writer not only appraised the cultural dilemma that bedeviled our peoples especially in the 1950's and 60's, he also helped, through pointed laughter or shared anguish, to sedate our people under such stress. (emphasis added.)[73]

When Rotimi wrote this play, Nigeria, like most newly independent African nations, was poised between the tasks of redefining its identity and enhancing its development. What Rotimi primarily reflects on in this play was the dilemma that arises from undertaking these tasks. In order to explore this theme, Rotimi presents two sets of characters: characters with a traditional attitude and westernized characters. Lejoka-Brown, Alhaji Mustafa, Mama Rashida, Sikira and her mother belong to the first group. Liza, Okonkwo and Lejoka-Brown's intellectual party deputies are westernized characters.

Of the first group of characters, Lejoka-Brown and Alhaji Mustafa are of a major interest. Lejoka-Brown is an arch traditionalist who attempts to embrace the new life style as it fits him. This makes him the most incongruous character in the play. The description of this character at the beginning of the play physically represents the cultural dilemma of this character: "The index and forefinger of his right hand held up in a 'Victory' sign, a mascot in the other hand, Major Lejoka-Brown responds with buoyant dignity to the cheering underlings!" (vii) Lejoka-Brown does not hope to win the election using only "modern" campaigning strategies or money. He seeks help from the spiritual world too. Thus, he takes the baby python whenever he goes to campaign and keeps it under his bed as a good-luck pet.

Alhaji Mustafa, on the other hand, is a purely traditionalist character.[74] Unlike the other characters, his dilemma is not how to fit into the new world but how to preserve the values that are part of his existence in a changing and developing world. He represents the traditional society who has been victimized

by the insensitive modernization policies which have been implemented in most African countries since independence. The demolishing of Alhaji Mustafa's old houses is a comment on these policies--the policies which aimed to replace traditional values entirely by modern ones without paying due attention to their relevance to the society. As has been suggested in Alhaji Mustafa's description of the demolishing of his house, such modernization schemes shock the traditional society and create tension:

> ... There is trouble. They have just broken down the house of my grandfather. Hmm--what the eye sees in this Lagos, the mouth can't describe. As if...it was nothing...the government demons broke it down with their white man's machine. It is disgrace, sisters. A horrible sight! I thought I could stop the devils.... (17)

Such schemes also escalate the conflict. Alhaji Mustafa decides to fight the government because the house is more than a home, it is a sacred altar for him. Thus, he borrows Lejoka-Brown's rifle to stop the authorities from breaking down his ancestors' house but later realizes the futility of his effort and resolves his dilemma by calling upon the values which he tried to defend:

> So I said to myself: "Alhaji Mustafa, you are only one man with only one gun, and out there, are three and twenty devils in uniform armed with three and twenty guns. Alhaji Mustafa get out of this place, o! Go away in peace. Hmm. Let the spirits of your Dead Fathers fight for you." Toh! (17)

Lejoka-Brown shares Alhaji's dilemma as his house is also on the "list"; but he hopes to resolve this problem with his political career: "I'll become the minister of Agric [sic] and Housing, Wife. By so, I will decide what house to pull down and what *shrines* to leave alone..." (38). Since the "antiquated wattle and clay-walled home" (vii) is a representation of his outdated ideas, one could say that his attempt to preserve his house is reactionary (the same argument could be applied to Alhaji Mustafa's actions.) However, his effort cannot entirely be dismissed as a hindrance to progress because the house he is trying to preserve is "a standing wonder of 19th Century indigenous architecture" (vii). Besides, like Alhaji Mustafa, the house has spiritual significance to him. As he constantly refers to it, the house is a shrine for him. His ancestors are buried in the court yard and, according to popular belief, their spirits also dwell in the house. Thus, when Lejoka-Brown learns about his political loss, the first thing which comes to his mind is not fighting for his political position but defending his house. This tells us how much he is concerned with preserving traditional values. Finally Lejoka-Brown, like his elderly neighbor, resolves his dilemma by calling upon those values which he is trying to preserve: "I'll make a sacrifice to my fathers, and then break down this old house. I'll build a new one on its soil" (75).

It is Liza who helps Lejoka-Brown resolve his dilemma and who epitomizes the other type of modernization suggested in the play. Liza's type of modernization, though apparently more fundamental than the first type, is less disruptive because it is not introduced as an imposition from the above; it relies on winning the peoples' hearts and also changes the people themselves to their

own advantage (the demolishing of the house is imposed by the government and relies on forces; and it is focused on material change, not on the people). Before attempting to explain to Sikira her thoughts on the equality of men and women, Liza first earns her friendship; Sikira benefits from this fundamental idea because it has relevance to her situation. The same thing could be said of Liza's teaching to Mama Rashida the basics of market economy and her furnishing of Lejoka-Brown's steward with the booklet on modern carpentry.

Although Rotimi presents Liza's modernizing role in a favorable light, he is also critical of it. He satirizes Liza's teaching by showing how Mama Rashida confusingly uses *Demand*, *Supply* and other terms which she learnt from Liza: "May Allah fill your womb with children--plenty, plenty children until your *Supply* becomes greater than the *Demand*!" (48) Liza's action to some extent represents the action of those African intellectuals who fervently attempt to overhaul the society as soon as they return to Africa from the west. The action of these intellectuals, although it is a reflection of their anguish about the underdevelopment of Africa and their commitment to their own society, is also a manifestation of their own dilemma. Their action is an effort to fit back into the society, and they attempt to achieve this by transforming the world which is no longer recognizable to them into a familiar world. That is what Liza does in the play: she transform Lejoka-Brown's house into a familiar setting for her. She makes her own kind of "a tight-fitting, micro-mini snippet of a dress" (53) for Sikira who negatively commented about Liza's dress at the beginning of the play(19). Liza's teaching of Sikira about women's liberation succeeds in dismantling the polygamous relationship which is strange to Liza and replaces it with a monogamous relationship which is familiar to her.

In addition to the general cultural situation, Rotimi's personal-life experiences also contributed to his interest in this theme. Since he has been married to a French-Canadian artist, he might have anticipated the problems that arise from cross-cultural marriage:

> I wrote the play in 1965: that was when our relationship was building up to a consummation in marriage. Perhaps some of the problems inherent in a cross-cultural marriage might have impinged on my subconscious sufficiently enough to find expression in aspects of this play.... [75]

In this play, Rotimi does not directly deal with the problems of cross-cultural marriage. However he suggests this problem through Liza's western views on women, marriage and arts.[76]

Rotimi, like every western-educated intellectual, might have anticipated the same kind of hostility which is expressed by his traditional-minded characters. This has been suggested through Lejoka-Brown and Sikira's hostilities to the western-educated characters: In response to their rejection of his whimsical election strategy, Lejoka-Brown attacks his educated colleagues: "They think because I didn't go to America-Toronto or to England-Oxford as *they* did, that I am a bat with my head downwards"(53). Sikira's hostility to the western-educated Liza is more severe:

> That black-white woman who spent her whole life roaming the streets of America!... Ha! I know her kind. They think that because they've been to England or to America-Toronto, they can kick every body round and round like a...football (16).

Rotimi appears to be suggesting a way to overcome this hostility through the deeds of Liza. She uses her role as a modernizer to reconcile herself with her hostile sister-in-marriage. Sikira, who is apprehensive about Liza's arrival, finally confesses: "Hm! You know, sisi Liza, I was afraid when I heard you were coming from America, o!" (48)

Other than the above-discussed themes, Rotimi addresses other themes minor to this play such as Nigerian and African unity. Sikira's mother claims that being an Owerri (a major Ibo town) she gave her daughter to a Yoruba man to promote national unity. This and the reference to the Congo civil war anticipates Rotimi's major concerns in his latter plays. Rotimi addresses the issue of African unity through Liza's and Lejoka-Brown's marriage. None of the characters, including Liza herself, make references to cultural and other differences which apparently exist between Nigerian and Kenyan societies. All of the characters accept Liza as one of them, and she too does not show any sign of being in a foreign land. The fact that all the characters tend to call themselves or their culture "African" rather than "Nigerian" strongly suggests Rotimi's deep concern with the issue of African unity.

In this chapter I have attempted to identify Rotimi's thematic concerns at the early stage of his career. The problem of political leadership, the incompatibility of the traditional marital institution with modern society, the question of women's liberation and modernization and its attendant cultural dilemma are the major themes that concerned Rotimi in Our Husband. In his exploration of these themes, Rotimi primarily relied on characterization. To treat the leadership theme from different angles, he presented a semi-literate and extravagant political figure on one hand and opportunist intellectual politicians on the other. To explore the polygamy and culture theme, he represented characters with different levels of traditional/modern attitude. Rotimi did not fully develop the characters in Our Husband. He presented them with only some aspects of their social and moral life. In this play he used language primarily as a means of characterization and to some extent as means of thematic realization: the pidgin and the different styles of English used by the characters, together with their Yoruba and Arabic expressions, represent their dilemma.

The light-hearted satirical approach which Rotimi used to examine these issues is the other important point. Rotimi used this approach to handle such sensitive themes as polygamy and women's liberation. Besides, as Alex C. Johnson commented, this approach also enabled him to depart from the dismal treatment of the above-mentioned themes which has been a general trend in African theater: "Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again is a successful stage comedy and a refreshing departure from the more depressing treatment of political and social themes by some other dramatists."[77] However, as I will

discuss in the next chapter, Rotimi later abandons this comic approach in favor of a tragic one.

CHAPTER THREE

Rotimi's thematic concerns between the First and the Second Nigerian Republics: **Ovonramwen Nogbaisi.**

When Rotimi returned from the U.S to Nigeria in 1966, his country was in deep political crisis: civilian rule had collapsed, and the military had taken charge of the country. This political crisis was further aggravated by violent ethnic strife, and soon the country plunged into a bloody civil war. Commenting on his personal experience of that time, Rotimi said:

> To be candid... I was experiencing a personal crisis of dilemma. Whether to remain in Nigeria with its social privations, or return to the States, take up a teaching job and live a life of great material comfort. In short, there was no inspiration to educe an artistic direction from me after Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again in Nigeria in 1966. Cast The first Stone seems to reflect that state of gloom and cynicism.[78]

As Rotimi hinted above, Nigeria's socio-political crisis had a significant influence in shaping his creative activities of this period. He abandoned his initial comic treatment of political and social themes in favour of a tragic approach. Instead of using contemporary situations, he began to use adaptations and historical materials to explore contemporary issues.

In addition to the socio-political situation, the job which Rotimi took after his return from the United States had an immense influence on his plays of this period. He took a research fellow position in the Institute of African studies of the University of Ife, and this position provided Rotimi a chance to know and understand in depth Nigeria's different ethnic groups' traditions. And this in turn helped Rotimi to create plays that are enriched with tradition and also to close the gap between his western-style plays and his audience.

Between the fall of the First Republic and the restoration of civilian rule in Nigeria, Rotimi wrote four major plays: The Gods Are not to Blame (1968), Kurunmi (1969), Holding Talks (1970) and Ovonramwen Nogbaisi (1971). In this chapter, focusing on Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, I will attempt to identify Rotimi's major thematic concerns during the period of the Nigerian civil war and the military rule, but first I will briefly outline the major themes in three of the plays mentioned above as they will shed light on the development of Rotimi's themes.

In The Gods Are not to Blame, his adaptation of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, Rotimi focuses on the major cause of the Nigerian civil war: ethnicity. He addresses this issue along with the leadership theme and shows how a leader who is blinded with tribal prejudices brings misfortunes to himself and to his people.[79] As Rotimi himself points out, The Gods marks the beginning of his search for an "Utopian model leader."[80] Rotimi continues this search for a leader in Kurunmi, his first historical play. There he presents a strong-willed and honest but misguided leader.[81] In this play Rotimi expands on the leadership theme and explores it from the individual, collective, political and military

perspectives.[82] In Kurunmi he also addresses the problem of social change and development in traditional society.[83] In Holding Talks, Rotimi's only non-realistic play, he turns his attention toward a more universal theme. Using humorous situations, he "exposes the irrationality of man's obsession with 'talking' in a situation that clearly demands action." [84] As Rotimi indicated in the 1979 production note of Holding Talks, this play not only represents Rotimi's responses to the lack of dynamism in contemporary Nigerian society but also his frustration over the lack of instant and purposeful action at the continental and global level:

> France flagrantly exploding bombs in the Pacific, the United Nations "discussing" the situation! The Republic of Guinea under invasion by Portuguese mercenaries, the O.A.U.[Organization of African Unity] arranging "Talks" on the incident to take place some two weeks after the deed. Africans in Mozambique being massacred, the world press "sending in observers" and "debating the issue" etc, etc.[85]

The issue of a dynamic approach to socio-political problems is one of the themes which Rotimi continued to address in his next play, Ovonramwen Nogbaisi.

Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, first performed in 1971 and published in 1974, is Rotimi's second historical tragedy. The play takes its title from the Oba (king) of the Benin Empire from 1888 to 1897 and deals with the downfall of Ovonramwen Nogbaisi and the destruction of one of the oldest and most highly organized Kingdoms in west Africa.

In Ovonramwen Rotimi goes beyond "appreciation of the past,"[86] a task which he had set for himself in Kurunmi, and re-examines Nigerian history. In this play Rotimi primarily challenges the conventional and prejudicial portrayal of Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi. In his background note to the play, Rotimi describes the Oba as "a man long portrayed by the biases of colonial History in the mein of the most abominable sadist but in actuality, 'a man more sinned against than he ever sinned'."[87]

In Ovonramwen Rotimi did not deny that the Oba was a ruthless leader but established the circumstances that made him act in such a way. These circumstances will be discussed later in relation to the leadership theme. Here we see how Rotimi challenged the colonial portrayal of the Oba as a sadistic figure. He presented him as a leader and a man who attempts to change his own fate and the destiny of his people. The Oba sends a messenger to the Oni of Ife[88] to know what is in store for him and for his people. He finds out that the future is "Fire, and an Ocean of blood--bodies floating in it" (5). When the Oba learns about this the first thought which comes to his mind is not his down-fall but the tragedy of his people: he interprets the oracle's prophecy as a civil war, "Binis [the Benin people] burning Binis, brothers freely killing brothers." To avert this bad luck, he follows the advice of the Ifa priest. Despite his effort, his worst nightmare becomes a reality. In Act Two, Scene IV he finds out that his chiefs massacred the British mission. The Oba understands the consequence of this. He realizes that what was foretold by the Ifa priest is soon to happen, and it is only he who

feels the danger (the voice of the Ifa priest which echoes over a loudspeaker apparently is heard only by the Oba) (37). Thus, the horror which the Oba feels in this scene is not only a personal horror but that of a leader who senses the danger his people are going to face. His reaction to the massacre is presented in contrast to the jubilation of the chiefs: "*Warriors dance triumphantly towards Ovonramwen and assemble the human heads in front of him. Ovonramwen stands, surveying the scene with lethargic horror. After a while, he raises a hand: drumming, jubilation subside*" (Rotimi, Ovonramwen, 37).

The above stage direction hints also at Rotimi's attempt to rehabilitate the image of the Oba by throwing light on his humane side, and the scene in general is part of Rotimi's effort to distance the Oba from the responsibility of the massacre. Although the Oba does not punish his chiefs for what they did, he neither approves of it: "Children of our fathers, Benin, I fear, has this day swallowed a long pestle; now we shall have to sleep standing upright" (37). And the chiefs disperse in silence, demoralized by his "uninspiring reaction" (37). This scene also refutes another historical account which claimed that the survivors of the massacre were later sacrificed in Benin.[89] As Rotimi indicated it in Act Two, Scene I, ritual ceremonies in which sacrifices are given to the gods are attended by the Oba. Thus, the Oba's disapproval of the massacre frees the Oba from the blame for the supposed ritual sacrifice of the British captives.

In order to align the audience's sympathy with the Oba, Rotimi portrayed the human nature of the "god-king" (81). Act Three, Scene IV in which the Oba runs away from the British, is the best example of this. In this scene the Oba comes to a realization that he is as fragile a human being as anyone:

> Gods...What has become of me? An oba? No...a wisp of cotton wool, fiercely yanked off its stalks by the wind in harmattan and cast into space, wafting loft, helpless, at the mercy of airy whims far beyond its control--a sea weed, buoyant, drifting, aimless, devoid of will-power, borne triumphant on the graceful canter of high tide, and then quisshh!(71)

While trying to correct the colonial portrayal of the Oba, Rotimi also challenges the conventional interpretation of the events of 1897. That year the British sent a punitive expedition to Benin which caused the destruction and subjugation of the Benin kingdom. The pretext for this expedition was the massacre of the British "diplomatic" mission by Benin war lords earlier that year. In Ovonramwen Rotimi challenges this excuse first by explaining the circumstances that forced the Benin warlords to attack the British mission. He establishes the British aggressive moves in West Africa and the anxiety and fear these moves created among Benin people. In the scene where the Oba and his chiefs are tried, the Oba explains this response:

> For Six Years now Benin has been gripped in fear. One time we heard that a big chief like Nana had been seized by the Whiteman and carried away from the Jekiriland of his fathers. Next time word reached us that King Jaja of the Opobo people...him also the Whiteman had overwhelmed and carried away to be killed in some strange far-place they call West Indies.

> Some time later we heard that the Whiteman had done the same thing again to one big king in the Gold Coast they called emm...Prempehson--of Ashanti. Our fear became heavy when Whitemen began to come to Benin the way they had been coming recently.... (59)

The other circumstance which causes the massacre of the "diplomatic" mission is the reluctance of the head of the mission to respect Benin customs. The British mission reaches Benin land at the height of the Ague Festival, during which strangers are forbidden to enter Benin city. Thus, the Oba demands that Phillips, the head of the mission and the British Vice-consul of the Niger Coast Protectorate, return after the ritual celebration is over. However, Phillips insists on entering the Benin city without delay, and he orders the caravan to advance to the city. The Benin people believe that the presence of strangers (the British) in their land during the Ague ritual ceremony angers their gods and brings misfortune to them. Therefore, they ambush and massacred the British, including Phillips, to protect themselves from the wrath of the gods.

In addition to the massacre of the Phillips mission, the British used another excuse to subjugate and colonize Benin: the practice of human sacrifice among the Benin people. As a civilized nation, the British felt that they were obligated to stamp out this practice from the Benin land. A few months before the 1897 expedition, one of the major British Newspapers wrote:

> Apart from all consideration of commerce on both sides the depopulation of the country by human sacrifices would be a sufficient reason for Her Majesty's Government stepping in to suppress horrors more atrocious than anything depicted in the history of any country in what is practically British territory.[90]

Rotimi did not make direct reference to the existence of the large-scale human sacrifice in Benin. The only reference to this practice in the play occurs when the Oba tries to convince his Chiefs that they should refrain from attacking the Phillips' mission:

> The gods are a part of our existence....They feel with us our dangers; they share with us the peace. The blood of slaves spilled upon their altars in prayer for wrongs done them, is enough to calm their anger and win them back into our existence again.... (34)

Rotimi de-emphasized this practice probably because this fact had already been extensively dealt within historical documents.

In addition, as indicated by Samuel O. Asein in his review of Rotimi's Ovonramwen, Nigerian playwrights such as Enwinma Ogieriakhi followed the colonialists' interpretation of the 1897 incident.[91] Thus, Rotimi's attempt to present another perspective of the history is justified.

The British claimed that one of the purposes of the 1897 expedition was to "civilize" the Benin Empire. Ralph Moor, British Consul-General of the Protectorate, announcing his decision to send the Oba into forced exile, says: "I'm afraid Overami [the British calls Ovonramwen, Overami] will have to come with me to Calabar, then to Lagos and other Yorubalands. There, Overami will learn

how the Blackman governs his own people in the peaceful ways of the Whiteman" (63). Rotimi rejects the civilizing mission of the British and instead focusses on the economic interests behind their removal of the Oba and the subjugation of the Benin people:

> Phillips. Commerce, Mr. Campbell! That is your answer! The conduct of trade in the colonies demands direct contact with the interior that produces the goods! Meanwhile Overami has placed a Juju on all produce from **that** interior....What then are we in Africa for? What object brings us here? Commerce, gentlemen! Commerce brought us to Africa; commerce determines our actions in Africa! (31-32)

As was mentioned earlier, Rotimi's main concern in this play is to re-examine history, but this does not mean that Rotimi is merely re-assessing historical facts for their own sake. He intends to draw historical parallels to contemporary socio-political problems, and this intention is evident in the play itself. For instance, the chorus repeatedly reminds the audience that what happened to the Oba is not just history but also today's reality:

> It is not for
> one day.
> Nay, it is not for one day
> alone--
> This story of Ovonramwen
> is a story for
> ever! (67)

Thus, when Rotimi exposes the economic motive of the 1897 expedition, he reminds the audience that colonial economic exploitation continues to exist in Nigeria, a fact made clear during the Nigerian civil war.[92] It should also be remembered that Rotimi wrote this play at the time when multi-national corporations were rushing to Nigeria to take advantage of the booming oil business in the country. The struggle between the Oba and the British for the control of trade routes along the Niger River, if seen in the light of the socio-economic situation of Nigeria at the time the play was written, reflects the struggle waged by Nigerian national bourgeois against foreign capitalists. This struggle started long before Nigerian independence. However, it was only around the time when Ovonramwen was produced that legal grounds were laid down to protect the interest of the Nigerian bourgeois: In 1971 the government issued the indigenization decree that reserved some branches of economic activity for Nigerian capitalists and compelled expatriate firms to sell shares to Nigerians.[93]

The above explains why Ovonramwen is so popular among the Nigerian ruling class. As the press release issued soon after the play's first production indicates, the play got an enthusiastic reception from members of this class:

> 'Ovonramwen Nogbaisi' [sic] became a darling play in the history of Nigeria's performing arts....There is a rush for tickets; and the Military

> Governor of the [Mid-West] state, Col. Osaigbovo Ogbemudia, whose Government jointly with the Institute of African Studies, sponsored the last Ife Festival of the Arts, is said to be delightfully awaiting the arrival of Ovonramwen Nogbaisi. He, together with his commissioners, top civil servants and the people of the state, will watch the play.[94]

Two decades have passed since its first production but Ovonramwen has not lost its nationalist appeal. This year a major Nigerian bank funded the revival of this play.[95]

It is important to note that the popularity of Ovonramwen is not limited to the Nigerian ruling class. The play was enthusiastically received by a wide range of Nigerian audiences, because it celebrates those things which are vital to a society which is trying to come to terms with its colonial past: that is, the courageous struggle of the past generation against colonial domination. Rotimi symbolically presents this struggle as follows:

> *For a brief while, Ologbosere and Moor stand glaring at each other. Then, first slowly, the movement building up, they begin to stalk each other: feline malevolence. Suddenly, the attack--the stems of their national symbols strike together, and lock. Pressure is applied on both sides. For a while, a stalemate... then oscillation, as the one strains to weigh down the other. At last... gradually, painfully, Ologbosere begins to give ground--sinking lower and lower under the oppressive muscles of his opponent.* (43)

In this play, Rotimi also celebrates the resistance movement that continued throughout the colonial period. He celebrates this movement primarily through Ologbosere's character. Among the Benin war lords, it is only Ologbosere who refused to submit to the British. Ologbosere's defiance of colonial domination motivates the Oba to resume the fight after he had already surrendered to the British:

> You will send word to Ologbosere in Okemue. Tell him that the fight with the whiteman [sic] begins afresh. Iyase, you prepare to send Ologbosere more soldiers--my own soldiers. Rally them round from wherever they may be. Obaseki, you pass word to the populace that all is not lost. (64)

However, the Oba was captured by the British before he succeeded in joining Ologbosere, and according to Robert Home's City of Blood Revisited, the Ologbosere continued the war for over two years until he was captured and executed by the British.[96] Rotimi does not bring Ologbosere's character to this tragic conclusion probably to suggest the continuation of the resistance movement in the form of a struggle against neo-colonial domination.

In Ovonramwen Rotimi deploys the full resources of traditional society both as a means of creating rich dramatic texture and also as a major theme.[97] It is in Kurunmi that Rotimi first introduced tradition as a theme (In The Gods he used tradition primarily as a means of adapting the dramatic situation in Oedipus Rex. He replaced elements of the Greek myth with Nigerian mythology, in order that his audience would more readily identify with the play). In

Ovonramwen Rotimi develops this theme into a celebration of Nigeria's pre-colonial tradition. He recreates "the pomp and pageantry that were part of the glory of the Bini Empire."[98] At the beginning of the play, he describes the Oba's entrance as follows:

> Drumming picks up tempo as the Ibierugha (royal Servants) and Ukoba (royal messengers) troop in, preceded by the Royal bard who meanders through the gathering, announcing in prolonged, sing-song yells, the advent of the Oba himself.
>
> .....
>
> The bearers of the royal 'asa' (sacred, red twin staves, the hape of a caret) appear. Following closely behind, is the imposing figure of the Oba himself. Right hand resting on the left shoulder of the royal page who is bearing the 'ada' (royal scimitar), the Oba is supported at each arm by two chiefs. (4)

There are other evidences of tradition in the play and the Ague festival is the major one. Rotimi opens Act Two, Scene I with this festival at its ritualistic climax. He uses this festival both to celebrate tradition and to represent the tragic consequence of the colonial incursion: "*Suddenly a harsh peal of drums coming from a distance breaks into the solemnity of the ceremony, brings the proceeding to a shocked stop*" (27).

Rotimi's celebration of the pre-colonial past and tradition is a challenge to the civilizing mission of colonizers; it is an assertion of the existence of uniquely African political, administrative and economic know-how before colonialism.[99] As is suggested in Robert Home's City of Blood Revisited, Iyase, Ologbosere and Obaseki, etc., are not names of war lords but are titles given to high-ranking office holders in the Benin Empire.[100] Thus, looking alone at the number of such titles[101] mentioned in the play, it is possible to see the intricate political, administrative and military structure of the Benin Empire.

Rotimi does not simply present the political and military apparatus of the Benin Empire but also shows its effectiveness. For instance in Act Two, Scene IV, he presents both the Benin and the British war councils mapping out their respective strategies and defence. In these alternating scenes the Benin war lords exactly predict the routes and point of attack of the British and deploy their force accordingly. Thus, when the British defeated the Benin warlords, the audience knows that the key to this victory was not greater military intelligence but rather superiority in weapons.

The British, as portrayed by Rotimi, recognize the richness of Benin's pre-colonial tradition: Moor, the Consul-General of the protectorate, says: "You have a rich tradition, Overami: rich in proverbs, rich in ceremonies, rich in...most things. I sometimes envy you greatly" (60). However, the British use this tradition to their advantage to complete their subjugation of the Benin kingdom. The British force the Oba to pay homage to them in public and in native fashion to crush the Benin people's faith in the god-king and to prove the superiority of the British. In addition, the British use the Benin traditional law to eliminate the

Benin ruling class:

Moor: ... Well now, we all know that your chiefs have killed **seven** Whitemen. And you know that those Whitemen were **my** representatives, **my** chiefs. According to your custom, therefore, seven of yours chiefs must now die. (60)

In addition to the themes discussed above, Rotimi continues to address some of the themes which he began to explore in his first play. Among these themes, the problem of leadership is the most important one. In Ovonramwen he presents "a traditional ruler who is attempting to hold his people together in a world that is changing shape."[102] Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi comes to power at the time when violent succession struggles and colonial invasion are threatening the Benin Kingdom. Moreover, when he assumes the throne of the Benin Empire, the traditional faith in the "god-king" is already in decline because of the increasing contact of Benin people with Europeans. One of the rebel chiefs' defiant responses to the Oba indicates clearly this decline: "Indeed: the Whiteman who is stronger than you will soon come!" (6) In spite of all these new conditions, the Oba considers his empire as a "sacred domain" and himself as a god-king whose authority is unquestionable (9). Thus, he determines to rule as his ancestors ruled: "Let the land know this: Ovonramwen Nogbaisi is henceforth set to rule as king after the manner of his fathers before him" (6-7).

The Oba does not only determine to rule in the old ways but also decides to tighten his grip on his people: "I deal lightly with men no more. Indeed, harshly now nave I learned that if like soap you try to make men clean, like soap [sic] you will dwindle in the act" (8). Therefore, he uses force to solve all the internal problems of the empire: he condemns his political rivals to death; he sends an ultimatum to the head of one of his vassal states who has fashioned for himself two royal swords as a symbol of his independence from the Empire; he also puts a ban on the Ijekiri people who threaten his monopoly of trade by directly dealing with the Europeans.

It is easy to see the connection between the authoritarian rule of the Oba and the then military leadership of Nigeria. Like the Oba, the then military leaders of Nigeria primarily used force to solve most of Nigeria's political and social problems: they used repression to contain political opposition; they forcefully suppressed the Biafran secession; they introduced the practice of public execution to cope up with armed robbery, etc.

The problem with the Oba's leadership is not only his use of force but also his reluctance to listen to his chiefs. When his chiefs appeal to him for forgiveness on behalf of the political dissidents, he turns down their appeal. When the Iyase tries to remind him that the sentence he passes on his political rival is against Benin law, he pays no attention to the Prime Minster's criticism. Generally, as the court jester later criticizes him, all the Oba's efforts are directed more toward instilling fear in his subjects than earning their loyalty (12). Consequently, he alienates his chiefs, and later when the Oba instructs them to be cautious in their dealing with Phillips' mission, they mistake his warning for a test of loyalty and

massacre the British caravan.

The other flaw of the Oba as a leader is that he loses his initiative at the time when he should be more active and dynamic. Toward the end of Act One, he receives a very grave warning from the oracle at Ife that his reign will swim in blood unless he proceeds with caution. From this moment onward, the initiative passes from the Oba to his chiefs. When the British advance in a huge caravan toward Benin city, instead of taking the matter into his own hands, the Oba leaves it to his chiefs. Again when he finds out what his chiefs did to the British mission, he fails to discipline them. Even when the final showdown with the British takes place, the Oba remains passive. Rotimi represents this with the following stage image: "Low lights on Oba Ovonramwen watching the imminent confrontation" (43).

Thus, Rotimi, by showing the Oba's earlier active role as leader and his later lack of initiative establishes one of the "cardinal attributes"[103] of sound leadership, namely: to act decisively. Rotimi says that an ideal leader "must be action-bound, happiest in his madness for purposive result."[104]

It is not only Oba's flaws as a leader which are presented in Ovonramwen but also his merits. As was discussed above, he is portrayed as a dynamic leader at the beginning of the play. Dum Okeke elaborates this point:

> It is only a powerful leader who can control such a vast empire as Benin Empire comprising several communities and traversing various ethnic groups such as the Binis, the Ishan, the Edos, the Itshekiri and so on. His powerful army appears to be very loyal to him and, hence he despatches a segment to any doubtful community or chief with clear-cut orders. These comply without argument. For instance the Udezi of Akure has to send some presents in addition to surrendering his new swords.[105]

Another of the Oba's positive attributes as a leader is that he is willing to correct his mistakes. When his court jester criticizes him for his harsh treatment of the chiefs, the Oba responds and takes the necessary measures to earn the loyalty of some of the chiefs: he marries Ologbosere to his daughter and gives him the responsibility of leading the empire's army. He also utilizes measures which unite the chiefs at the time of crisis: "Sons of our fathers, from the cleanness of my heart, I have served you Kolanuts. The eyes...the nose...are one. Whenever one is hurt, the other sheds water. Pray, may nothing hurt the land or the throne" (35).

The Oba is also capable of compromise. When Phillips insists on entering Benin city during the Ague festival, the Oba considers permitting the mission into the city in order to avoid any confrontation with the British. To appease the gods for the damage done to them for allowing strangers into the land during the festival, he would then provide them with a sacrifice. In addition, when the British threaten to continue their destruction of Benin city and its people, the Oba agrees to surrender and pay homage to them in public.

Rotimi is also interested in the wisdom and integrity of the Oba as a leader. He presents him as a ruler who "can hardly take any decision without reference to native oral performances and idioms."[106] He also shows the Oba

as a leader who is capable of seeing the dubious schemes of colonizers behind their mask of friendship. The Oba earnestly asks Hutton, the British Emissary: "...what do **you** gain that, like the early morning sun, uninvited, you venture from your home to light up places distant and unknown?" (19).

Because the Oba speaks in the third person this serves to further emphasize the stature of the Oba as a leader. Moreover, when the Oba pays homage in native fashion, his chiefs as well as the British become shaken by the sight (54). Thus Rotimi sees the tragedy of the Oba not only as a tragedy of one person but also as a tragedy of the Benin people as a whole. Rotimi describes the last lamenting chant of the Benin warriors as a "symbolic representation of the enshacklement of a god-king, the fall of an empire, the end of an era..." (79).

The other major theme in Ovonramwen which comes through from Rotimi's first play is the conflict of cultures. The British attempt to enter Benin city at the height of the Ague festival, and its tragic outcome is the high moment of the cultural conflict theme in this play. To the British officers, the Ague festival is a mere pagan observance. Phillips, the head of the mission, responding to the advice of some of his colleagues to wait until the festival, says: "But how long, gentlemen, must British trade policy remain crippled by the whims and ritual taboos of a fetish Priest-King?" (32)

Ignorance of and insensitivity to foreign cultures is not limited to the British side only. For instance, when the Oba learns that Queen Victoria is widowed, he tells her Emissary:

> Then, let her take another husband from among her own people. A woman without a man is like rich farm-soil without the feel of roots. A beautiful woman without a man is a crab--Over-protected by shells: selfish.
>
> Tell your Queen that Ovonramwen Nogbaisi says she must have another man. (18)

The cultural dilemma is the other aspect of the theme of cultural conflict. The roof of the Oba's palace is the best visual representation of this dilemma. "A small portion of my roof is the pride of the Whiteman--Zinc sheets," tells the Oba to the Ijekiri traders, "but a wide area of it is humble, native' *emaha*" [thatch] (10). Therefore, he orders them to bring him twenty thousand Zinc sheets as a payment for the loss which they caused him to incur by trading directly with the Europeans: he wants to benefit from "civilization" and at the same time he is attempting to limit the contact of his subjects with Europeans.

The Oba, like Alhaji Mustafa and Kurunmi in Our Husband and in Kurunmi respectively, is doing everything to ensure the continuation of tradition. For instance, when the Ekpoma elders refuse to recognize their late ruler's legitimate heir as their new leader, the Oba dispatches two of his royal guards to Ekpoma "to make sure the eldest son is crowned Head of Ekpoma" (11).

In addition to the above-discussed themes, Rotimi explores secondary themes such as the cycle of injustice. At the beginning of the play, Rotimi shows

the Oba committing injustices. The Oba orders the execution of all his political rivals without paying due attention to the circumstance which led the accused to commit the crime they are accused of. The accused chiefs claim that they killed the Oba's chief advisor in revenge for the Oba's killing of their brothers. The Oba dismisses their claim, saying that their brothers were rebels and deserved death. The Oba also does not pay due attention to the Benin law which says that "when a chief kills another chief, a chief must die for the one killed" (60). He sentences all the accused chiefs to death as punishment for the death of one chief. Later in the play, Rotimi presents the Oba and his chiefs as the victim of colonial injustices. The British conduct a trial in which they are the accusers, the judge and suppliers of witnesses. Thus, they condemn the Oba and his chiefs without paying due attention to the stubborn acts and intrigues of the slaughtered British officials.

In the preceding discussion, I have pointed out that re-examining history, the problem of leadership, protest against colonial and neo-colonial domination, celebration of pre-colonial tradition and cultural conflict are Rotimi's major concerns in Ovonramwen. In his exploration of these themes, other than characterization, arrangements of incidents and language, Rotimi used different theatrical devices such as dance, mime, mass movement, sound effects, songs, etc., to convey his meaning. As Michael Etherton comments, "the full meaning of the play may be more obvious to an audience at a performance than to the reader of the text."[107] The specific stage directions which the playwright provides in the play indicate that the play's full meaning is dependant on its production. For instance, in the trial scene where the Oba is forced to pay homage to the British and where the chiefs are condemned to death, Rotimi gives the following stage direction: "*It is suggested that some chiefs and commonality move into the auditorium and share seats with members of the audience or simply crouch wherever possible in the aisles, so that the audience now become a living part of the action in this scene*" (51). Another example which indicates the emphasis on performance in this play is the Oba's reaction to the massacre of the British mission. The Oba's lethargic horror can be played at different levels. The final stage direction of the play also suggests the full meaning of the play is dependant on the actual production: "*They chant in lament: symbolic representation of the enshacklement of a god-king, the fall of an empire, the end of an era...*" (79). And as Michael Etherton explained it the "symbolic representations" mean a series of gestures which convey the meaning of the songs, sung in Edo language by the two prisoners.[108]

To conclude this chapter, once again I would like to return to the overall picture of Rotimi's creative activity between the fall of the First Republic and the restoration of civilian rule in Nigeria. This period is a formative stage in Rotimi's career, and as he himself points out, the period represents his search for his own voice:

> You might say between '66 and '79 were the years of experimenting on a number of theatrical levels: linguistic, use of cultural elements, music, dance, mime, sound, etc. I also tried, in terms of content and theme, to

> articulate in plays written between '66 and '79 the anxieties of the present, drawing some hope from the principled nature of the elder of our past who stood in defense of their convictions.[109]

The general picture of Rotimi's plays of this period is that they address issues that concern the fate of kingdoms and empires, and their characters are kings, generals and chiefs. In addition, these plays show a great degree of spectacle for they are set in palaces, require mass movement as they involve many characters, demand the use of a variety of masks and costumes as they involve ritual ceremonies. What all these indicate is that the themes explored in these plays are larger than the themes addressed in Rotimi's plays of the beginning period.

The major focus of these plays reflects the most pressing problems of Nigerian society between 1966 and 1979: most of these plays deal with warfare and aim at strengthening Nigerian unity (The Gods defies tribalism; Kurunmi and Ovonramwen focus on the common past which Nigerian ethnic groups are sharing). Toward the end of the seventies Nigerian society underwent tremendous changes. Rotimi responded to these changes by shifting his focus from the tragedy of rulers to the tragedy of the ruled.

CHAPTER FOUR

Rotimi's thematic concerns during Nigeria's Second Republic: **Hopes of the Living Dead.**

Toward the end of the seventies Ola Rotimi departed from his earlier creative directions. He began to write plays which were markedly different from his earlier works, both with respect to the issues alluded to and the style used. In this chapter, focusing on Hopes of the Living Dead (1985), I will discuss Rotimi's major concerns at this new stage of his career; but before going into that discussion, I will provide an overview of If, the play which marked the beginning of the new phase in Rotimi's career.

If was first produced in 1979 at the time when power was transferred from military to civilian hands, and, like Our Husband, it addresses current socio-political issues using a contemporary situation. As in Rotimi's first play, the issue of proper use of voting rights became a major focus in If. Unlike Rotimi's earlier plays, If reflects the predicament of ordinary contemporary Nigerians trying to cope with adverse social and political circumstances. The very dedication of the play is a testimony to this point: "to the New Generation of the Ruled, menaced by the incubus of an eternal drift...."[110]

In If Rotimi approached the socio-political problems from a class perspective and exposed the exploitation of the common people by the rich and powerful.[111] He also presented his insights into the possible means of social redemption. He established the power of the people in the making of good leadership and urged them to use their voting rights consciously to effect good leadership. He emphasized the necessity for solidarity among the masses to bring social changes; and he explored the role education plays in changing the society. Along with his insights, he presented the various panaceas for socio-political problems which are advocated by the followers of Christianity and Marxism. Despite all these solutions, Rotimi ended the play on a pessimistic note, showing the masses experiencing the tragic consequence of their failure to use their power. And this is one of the aspects of If which Rotimi continued to work on in his next play, Hopes of the Living Dead.

Rotimi produced Hopes of the Living Dead in 1985, soon after the collapse of Nigeria's Second Republic. He based this play on the 1928-32 "Lepers' Rebellion" in Nigeria. In 1924 about forty lepers were hospitalized in Port Harcourt General Hospital, Southern Nigeria, for an experiment on a cure for leprosy. However, the introduction of this kind of research in a "normal" hospital provoked a public outcry, and Dr. Fergusson, a Scottish medical practitioner, was forced to abandon his experiment and return to his country. Next, the British colonial adminstration decided to flush the patients into the bush, but the lepers stood their ground. After a long and hard struggle, the patients succeeded in forming their own settlement in Uzuakoli, where they lived in security and became self-sufficient.

In Hopes Rotimi once again returned to history, but this time, as Martin Banham points out, with a firm allegorical intent.[112] Rotimi used the historical material as a spring-board for creating a parable which articulates the aspirations and struggle of the present. Commenting on the main thrust of Hopes, Rotimi said: "The purpose of the play is to reveal the sordidness of our moribund state in the hope of rousing, of waking ourselves up from it, and heading somewhere."[113] In the same interview Rotimi also described Hopes as the third play in his socio-political trilogy (the other two are Our Husband and If).[114]

Evidence of the parable is particularly visible in the play's characterization. With the exception of the central figure, the other characters appear to be the product of the playwright's imagination. Many of them are named by their social functions: Court Clerk, Editor, Catechist, Corporal etc. The aliases of these characters also suggest that they are representations of the society in terms of profession. They are also a microcosmic representation of Nigerian society in their ethnic backgrounds. Among them there are inmates from Yoruba, Tv, Hausa, Edo, Ibibo, Kalabari, Isan ethnic groups. But as is pointed out in the production note, the ethnic composition of the play may be altered "depending on the linguistic varieties which the actors on hand represent"[115]--another example of the non-historical nature of the characters.

Hopes is divided into three acts, respectively titled: Crisis; Strain of Leadership; Solidarity and Movement. As with If, each of the three acts is subdivided into *Happenings*. These *Happenings* are composed of small self-contained incidents which either dovetail or overlap with each other to create theatrical 'naturalness'. In his introduction to the published script, Rotimi proposed the same dynamics of staging be used in Hopes as in If: "a convoluting concourse of juxtaposed variegated happenings" (x).

In this play, as in If, Rotimi concerned himself not with the destiny of rulers but with the plights of the ruled. The characters are the worst victims of the politico-economic malaise of the society, which is metaphorically represented by the leprosy image. They are also outcasts who are reduced to a sub-human level. However, as is noted in the description of the costumes of the characters, the inmates have not lost their self-respect: "They [the clothes] are aged, wear-chafed, and submissively weather-rattled. But by **no means** filthy" (2). They have also the potential for changing their condition, and by showing what these characters did about their condition, Rotimi asserted the potential of the masses.

Hopes is Rotimi's dramatic statement about the possibility of change. Using the example of the lepers' uprising and its positive outcome, Rotimi showed that the victory which eluded the masses in If is achievable. He also established the factors which make this victory possible.

Rotimi saw good leadership as the first major factor of social change. He used the example of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, the leader of the lepers' uprising, to recreate the kind of leadership the people need. Unlike the other leader figures in Rotimi's earlier plays, this character is neither a king, warlord or a notable

personality, at least when leading the uprising. (Later he became one of the founders of Nigeria's choral music.) He is a leader who is "born from the scuttled rank of the people"[116] and who equally shares the "curse" and suffering of the people.

Harcourt Whyte is presented as an embodiment of those qualities which eluded the leader figures in Rotimi's other plays. Unlike Odwale in The Gods are not to Blame, Harcourt Whyte is an "unreservedly detribalized"[117] leader, and it is this attribute which enables him to identify the strength of the bondage which ties the patients together beyond any tribal sentiment:

> Now, I want everybody to remember this. We all are part of this land. We are not fighting the people. We are fighting *for* the people. We are fighting for the simple things which everybody wants. The strong or the sick; Fulani or Ijo; man or woman; Yoruba or Ibibio: old and young; Hausa or Urhobo; rich or poor, Kanuri or Ibo: everybody wants one thing in life. We all want to go to sleep at night in peace, and to wake up in the morning with trust that there will be food for the stomach, a good day's work for the hands, and a roof over the head to return to. Who is the madman here who does not want just these? (56)

Although the authorities hoped to exploit the diverse ethnic backgrounds and languages of the patients, Harcourt Whyte succeeds in keeping the inmates together both by respecting their diversity and demanding from them that they surmount their prejudices which are the result of their diversity.[118]

Harcourt Whyte believes that the people are the ultimate source of power. He also realizes that "to act for the well-being of his people, a good leader must listen to the voices of his people" (71). He refuses to accept the authorities' plan to move the inmates to a temporary settlement before discussing the implication of the new proposal with his followers (71). And when the authorities press for an immediate decision, he makes a concession without jeopardizing the inmates' cause. Before he notifies the authorities of his decision he instructs "Court Clerk":

> ...I can't see them releasing us both at once. Anyway, listen. One point is clear. When we do quit Port Harcourt, it's Uzuakoli. That is final. Meanwhile, listen....You will go to people, if in truth the man does release one of us. Tell the people: the IDH is still *inside* Port Harcourt. To the IDH, then, we shall go. The whole group. They move first thing tomorrow morning. Together. Now, as soon....
>
> .....
>
> When they move to the IDH, Newke and one other person depart immediately. They hurry to Uzuakoli, to see the land that the authorities talk so much about.
>
> .....
>
> Tell Newke, when he comes back from Uzuakoli, it must-- you're listening? It must be with a solid report. Yes, it is true; or no, it's sweet talk. (72)

Rotimi illustrated the leadership skills of Harcourt Whyte in the above passage by showing his proficiency in decision-making. In Act One, Happenings II,

Rotimi gave another instance of Harcourt Whyte's decision-making ability. In this scene, offended by Catechist's and other inmates' comments, Editor tears the appeal into bits and refuses to prepare another one, frustrating the inmates, because among them it is only Editor who has both the knowledge and fingers to prepare a written appeal. Harcourt Whyte resolves this crisis by matching Court Clerk, who has the knowledge of writing, to work with Newke, who has the physical ability of writing:

> CC [Court Clerk]--I said: stand up! Mushrooms don't grow on a tree that is alive! Stand up! You will write the letter. You hear me? I say you will write it, and you *can* write it. Nweke! You sit down there. Pick up that pen and paper. CC, you dictate what you want written and how you want it written. Nweke, you write down exactly what CC says (27).

In this scene, responding to the intellectual arrogance of Editor, Harcourt Whyte establishes an important organizing principle: joining forces to overcome limitation, a principle which he later uses to free the inmates from their dependency on others.

Harcourt Whyte is portrayed as a selfless and committed leader. While in prison the condition of his health deteriorates, but he puts his leadership responsibilities before his health and continues to coordinate the movement. The authorities realize that imprisoning Harcourt Whyte neither stops the uprising nor forces Harcourt Whyte to give up the struggle. Thus, they design a strategy similar to that is used by the Landlord in If: frustrating the collective action of the people by buying off their leader. The Superintendent of Police explains to Harcourt Whyte why he should accept the special privilege offered to him by the authorities:

> ...Nobody grows younger, you know....well, like everybody also as the years creep on--you might just want to rest. Relax. No landlord to push you about. A house--your own. A lump sum gratuity in addition, perhaps. And a regular monthly pension--like any respectable, retired man with a meritorious service behind him. And no mistake about that, brother. You have tried. For your people, I mean. All those years of self-sacrifice. Anyway, no matter. Nothing matters (74).

Harcourt Whyte, like Papa in If, refuses to betray his followers and continues to lead the movement. However, after the patients are transferred to their temporary settlement near the cemetery, the movement gets into a serious crisis: The authorities stop providing the inmates with supplies, and soon the scarcity of basic necessities threatens to rip the group apart. Some of the inmates even flee the group. At this point the authorities once again approach Harcourt Whyte with a bribe. However, he remains committed to continuing the struggle with those who are determined to go forward.

These are the major leadership attributes reflected in the play, and the attributes serve as indicators of the playwright's intent in recreating this historical figure. As opposed to other leaders in Rotimi's other plays, Harcourt Whyte is a

flawless leader. (In Act Two, Happenings IV, there is even a suggestion to compare this character with the Biblical Moses.) Rotimi pointed out that this character is the full realization of his "theme of Utopian Models"--a theme which he first hinted at in The Gods and developed in If with the character of Papa.[119]

When Rotimi recreated Harcourt Whyte as an ideal leader, he was not only establishing the leadership factor of social change but also responding to the continuous depiction of "insatiable lust for power, of misrule, and of betrayal of the people's cause" in post-independence Nigerian/African theatre.[120] Rotimi wondered if Nigerian/African playwrights' persistent focus on negative heroes had any contribution to the general lack of faith in the possibilities of good leadership and just societies on the continent:

> The question crossed my mind: could it be that our African peoples have become sickened from witnessing spectacles of bad rulers in office and on the stage, so much so that their idea of positive leadership has gone awry, become blurred, finally consigning them to stunned fatalism and fatigue?[121]

Rotimi attempted to dispel this gloom and to inspire hope in the society through the positive leadership of Harcourt Whyte. He considered this as his major contribution to African theatre: "The idea of flaunting the image of an 'ideal' leader as a foil to the negative stereotypes, inspired me to consolidating a new theme for contemporary African Dramatic Literature."[122]

In this play, Harcourt Whyte, though a leader, is not presented as a lone hero. There are other characters who provide leadership to the group. Among these characters Hannah is the most important. By showing Hannah's active role in the movement, Rotimi reintroduced one of the major issues of Our Husband--the participation of women in leadership--and further developed it. Niyi Osundare, in his review of Hopes, called Hannah the ideological *alter ego* of Harcourt Whyte and described her as an articulate, stubbornly positive and reliable leader.[123] Although she is fourth in command, she is the most active and resolute leader next to Harcourt Whyte. She thunders in when incoherence threatens the group.[124] In Act One, Happenings II inmates fight over Catechist's abandoned bed. Harcourt Whyte mediates this conflict. However, the inmates keep fighting over the bed, disregarding Harcourt Whyte's decision. At this point Hannah intervenes and "*heaves the bed up manfully...and hurls it upside down*" (24), announcing that none of them would be allowed to use the bed.

Rotimi emphasised Hannah's stern leadership. In Act Two, Happenings VII, discipline among the group deteriorates as a result of the scarcity of supplies and poor living conditions at the new settlement. These adverse conditions culminate in the argument and fight between Editor and Catechist. When things appear to be out of control, Hannah enters and severely criticizes the inmates' lack of perseverance in the face of difficulties:

> Spoilt--that's the problem! Spoilt by too much help from outsiders--Dr. Fergusson, the Rev. Dodds, Dr. Savage! Now we're alone in a canoe, and

> think we would go faster on a crocodile's back! All right...
> (*roughly shoving the* inmates *apart*)
> Let's scatter! Scatter, everybody. Go your separate ways, I say!
> .....
> Let's curse ourselves, disgrace our children forever; be without discipline, love confusion, embrace hate! (85)

The inmates listen to Hannah and respond positively to her stern leadership: they stop the fighting and also take disciplinary measures against the two main culprits: Editor and Catechist.

Since Editor and Catechist are part of the leadership, the disciplinary actions that have been taken against them have far great implications than showing the importance of discipline in such a movement. As Court Clerk comments, the trial of the two characters is a lesson in discipline for those who are in the position of leadership: "To control a country, a good leader must first try to discipline his disciples" (98). This leadership problem has been a major concern for Rotimi for a long time. In Chapter Three we saw the damage the Benin Empire had suffered as a result of the Oba's failure to discipline his warlords. In If Hamidu, the young medical doctor (alias "Che Guevara"), dictating his criteria for voting to Akpan, who is his political apprentice, says:

> Voters ask themselves: is the leader of the Party capable of controlling and disciplining his partymen? Now, I say this is the most important because the collapse of a nation begins with indiscipline in the ranks of the those who rule or govern. Therefore to any Political Leader who aspires to a successful rule of this nation, I say, the fundamental secret to that success is this: discipline your disciples, and you'll control the country.[125]

In his Statements, a collection of articles which was published around the time of his writing of Hopes, Rotimi called "disciplining the disciples" a "Fundamental Leadership":[126]

> The single quality one expects in a leader of this nation at this stage is the stamina to discipline those around him, first and foremost. The premise here is that, ruination of the whole is more intractable, more insidious, if the rot begins at the *core*.
>
> Briefly stated, the motto for any leader intent upon making his mark on this nation should be: *discipline your disciples*, and you'll *control the country*. That is the touchstone to capable leadership in this country.[127]

Solidarity of the masses is the other major factor of social change which is explored in Hopes. The theme was initially introduced in If where the tenants under the leadership of Papa overcome their differences and prejudices in order to act collectively against their landlord who had attempted to force them to vote for him. In Hopes Rotimi made this theme one of his major foci (he actually subtitled the third act "Solidarity and Movement") and developed it by presenting the positive result which solidarity yields.

In If Hamidu explains to his fellow tenants that their solidarity is the basis

of their human existence: "The day our solidarity dissolves is the day our humanity ends, and our worthlessness begins."[128] Solidarity for the inmates in Hopes is not only a way of preserving their humanity but also a weapon with which they "impress their modest right to existence upon the complacence of world conscience" (iv). Hamidu's cry for solidarity in If gets practical response in Hopes: organizing and mobilizing themselves as one man, the patients frustrate the forceful attempts of the authorities to expel them from the hospital; they cope with the difficulties they encounter at their temporary settlement and eventually force the authorities to resettle them decently at the place where they can live in security and work for themselves. The one thing which Harcourt Whyte demands from them before they depart to "the promised land(108)", Uzuakoli, is strengthening the communal feeling which they forged during their struggle:

> Now we've won our freedom. But this is only the beginning of a new struggle, my people. From this day on things will happen to us. Perhaps, rough things: things without gladness. But...together. To tackle them, we must stand together, children of our fathers. Not apart. The day children of the porcupine made bond to drift apart: one going this way, a mouse; the other going that way, a bush rat, is the day both mouse and bush rat became food for cats. Together, then, we move. If not for our gains, then for the gains of our sapling to come. (111)

But to reach to this kind of solidarity, they had first to overcome the kind of greed and ignorance that was portrayed in Act One, Happenings II. In this scene two inmates fight for Catechist's bed: Alibo, who has his own sleeping mat, wants to take over Catechist's abandoned bed, instead of letting Jimoh, who has neither, use it. On the other hand, Jimoh refuses to sleep on Alibo's mat because he thinks that Alibo's leprosy is worse than his own and fears that he will contract his friend's diseases: "The gods forbid it! Why? Mine is the skin type of leprosy, but this man's? The fingers and toes are gone" (24). While showing the greed and ignorance among the group, Rotimi also presented the potential of the group to effect solidarity. In Act One, Happenings IV, Catechist, returning from his futile journey, brings a wandering soldier (alias "Corp'l), his wife and their child. Although the inmates themselves are in a desperate situation, they allow the newcomers to stay with them and share all what they have. This act of solidarity pays off: the Corp'l organizes and trains the inmates (53-55) so that they can resist the forceful expulsion from the hospital by the authorities.

The language diversity is the other difficulty which the inmates have to overcome to create a sense of solidarity among themselves. To surmount this difficulty, the inmates adopted the "each one tell one" principle. When an inmate conveys a message or a comment in one language, the others translate to their linguistic kith and kin: for instance, the character who understands both English and Hausa translates to his Hausa inmate, if the latter knows Yoruba he conveys the message to Yoruba-speaking inmate, this one to Igbo, the Igbo to Tiv, etc. The following scenes serve as examples of the theatrical presentation of the above-mentioned communication mechanism. In the first scene Harcourt Whyte

breaks the news of Dr. Fergusson's imminent departure to the inmates and in the second one he mediates the earlier mentioned fight between two inmates for a bed:

HW ...Each one tell one. I heard something this afternoon. What was heard was about our doctor.
Group shows heightened interest.
I tried to find out from the doctor himself. But he couldn't see me this afternoon. I tried again this evening.
Multi-lingual interpretation is done concurrently among members of the group, but subliminal whispers (19).

.....

HW One by one--people--
(*indicating Yoruba inmate*)
Who understands him?

Nweke Mama Musi

Mama Musi (*comes forward and addressees the Yoruba combatant*)
Jimoh, ki lo de?
[meaning: Jimoh, what's the matter?]
Jimoh Nse ni okunrini yi joko si ori ibusun yi, ko je kin sun.

Mama Musi He say this one sit down bed. Him ...
(*lost for words, gestures sleeping*) (23)

In Hopes Rotimi represents the debilitating dependency of Nigerian/African societies on others through the use of the disabling ailment of the inmates. Showing the humiliation, the uncertainty, the chaos and the hardship which the characters are experiencing, he communicates to his audience the implications of this dependency. Using as an example what the inmates achieved through self-help, he proposed that in order to build a just society Nigerians/Africans must also depend on their own potential: self-reliance. This is the third factor of social change which Rotimi establishes in Hopes.

It is in The Gods that Rotimi first hinted at self-reliance as an offshoot theme. There Odwale, King of Kutuje, confronts the townspeople who come to him, seeking remedy for their suffering: "Now, you have all come here, sprawling, vomiting, rubbing tears on one another begging me to do my duty, and help you. But what about you yourselves? What have you done to help yourselves?"[129] And the king challenges them to depend primarily on themselves: "If you need help, search for it first among yourselves."[130] In If Rotimi brought this theme to the centre: Young Onyema and his New Nigeria Youth Brigade friends sing a "Self-reliance" song at one of the play's high moments: at Papa's and his ailing wife's (Nigeria's image) anniversary party: "Self-reliance self-help/This is the only way/The only way, the only way/To build a great nation."[131]

In Hopes, citing the example of the historical Uzuakoli Leper Settlement, Rotimi reminded his audience that success through self-help is not something

unreal. In this play, as he did with the leadership and solidarity factors, he went beyond stating the importance of self-reliance: he showed what self-reliance meant in practice. As he presented it in the play, self-reliance is a skilful use of the potential of the masses. While in prison, Harcourt Whyte instructs his colleagues to organize the inmates according to their physical ability so that they can start their own collective farm: "Editor and Mallam are to organize people with fingers. We start our own farm at the IDH. Those without hands--carry things. With their arms. Water, anything that needs to be carried for the good of the people" (72).

Rotimi also showed that self-reliance is being resourceful. In Act Two, Happenings V, when the inmates confront the policemen who came to expel them from the hospital, one of the inmates (alias "Corp'l") knocks a rifle from the sergeant's grip. However, he is unable to grab the rifle off the floor for the rifle keeps slipping from the stumps of his fingerless hands. Discarding the rifle, the inmate storms toward the Sergeant, thrusting forward his leprosy-stricken arms, and he forces the police to flee.

Rotimi shows that self-reliance is also the courage to say "no" to any kind of outside help that robs the working spirit of the people. At the end of play Harcourt Whyte rejects the offer of free treatment, free meals, and free lodging to the inmates by the authorities at their new settlement:

> No! No! Rejected. For long, we depended on the people outside--yes, the whiteman, [sic] the missionaries, the black Givers-of-alms...
> (*mimicking*)
> "beggars, here take...take...." When suddenly they withdrew their help, confusion gripped us, ripping us apart. Well, we've since learnt our lesson. We must depend on ourselves. There is no going back on that!(110)

Although the self-reliance and self-help theme is a basic issue to Nigerian/African society, it was a burning issue to Nigerian society when Rotimi wrote Hopes. At that time Nigeria economy was near total collapse as a result of the sharp decline of world oil prices in the eighties. The country which extended help to other African countries at one time was unable to import enough rice to feed its people in the eighties.

In addition to the above-discussed major themes Rotimi addressed other minor themes in Hopes: he criticized the intellectuals for their failure to place their knowledge in the service of the masses. In the scene where Editor refuses to rewrite the petition according to the comments of the inmates, Hannah criticizes Editor for his arrogance and through him the elite:

> ...Turn around and look at the face of the majority. I dare you to. Listen to what those silent faces are saying. You can't? Then let me tell you, brother they're cursing...You hear? Cursing us: the book people, the blessed! We are supposed to lead them. Supposed to save them, and save ourselves too. Not so? We have seen the light.(26)

However, Rotimi's criticism of the elite in this play is not as sharp as in Our Husband. In If he presented the young generation of intellectuals in a more

favourable light though he was critical about their ideological stance. On the other hand, through the character of Papa he portrayed the old elite as ideal leaders.

In Hopes Rotimi briefly addressed the colonial issue, but in this play his approach to this issue was not as partisan as it was in Ovonramwen. As he did in The Gods are not to Blame, in which he explored the causes of Nigerian civil war and Africa's post-independence problems, he critically looked at the colonial issue. He questioned the role played by the Africans themselves in the colonization process. In Act Two, Happenings IV, the Corporal proudly narrates his heroic deeds in the British West African Army. Although Rotimi presented this narration with some degree of understanding (he made Court Clerk listen to the Corporal with generous attention) his intention was to question the Africans' role both under colonialism and neo-colonialism. In the same scene Rotimi criticized directly Africans for letting themselves into the trap of the colonialist: challenging Editor's "Rum, Rifle and Ruin" analysis of colonialism, Catechist says: "...why take the Whiteman's *rifle*? Having taken, why go on a rampage killing your own brothers and bringing the land to ruin?" (49)

In the seventies it was the official policy of the government to promote Nigeria as a rich and a great nation, and in some respects it is possible to say that Rotimi had concurred with this policy in his historical plays, especially in Ovonramwen Nogobaisi. But in Hopes of the Living Dead Rotimi went to the bottom of the society and presented an image which challenged the official version of the national identity. Commenting on the title of the play, Rotimi said: "By the way I use the word dead as pointer to our politico-economic malaise. In that context, we are dead people."[132]

Rotimi used various dramatic devices to communicate his themes in this play. As in most of his plays, in Hopes he used songs which "agree with the contextual sense of the dramatic moments to which they are applied" (vi). The songs which Rotimi used in this play were composed by Harcourt Whyte himself. (Harcourt Whyte later became one of the fathers of contemporary Nigerian choral music.) Thus, the songs enforce the connection between the past and the present as they are juxtaposed with the historical incident which preceded the time of their composition. Besides, since they are the symbols of Harcourt Whyte's personal success, they authenticate the optimistic message of the play. By bringing in Harcourt Whyte's personality as an artist, the songs also added dimension to his leadership image and also to the leadership theme: the artist as a leader.

In Hopes language "is not just a medium of dramatic expression, it is also a vehicle for [the play's] thematic thrust."[133] In this play Rotimi brought his experimentation of multi-lingual usage in dialogue to its logical conclusion. It was in If that he began this experiment. Over fifteen indigenous languages are employed in this play,[134] and as was noted earlier, the characters have established effective communication by setting up translation chains. Thematically this reflects the possibility of collective action despite tribal and language differences. As Niyi Osundare described it in his review of the 1985 Ibadan University production of Hopes, Rotimi used the multi-lingual aspect of the play

to bring out the chaos which the characters are facing and trying to overcome: "So many times the stage turns into a cacophony of tribes as each character shouts his desperation in his own language. At such moments, tension takes possession and communal unity receives a savage punch."[135]

Earlier in this chapter I mentioned the nature of Rotimi's plot construction style in If and Hopes: he attempted to avoid the limiting implication of linear plotting in these plays by presenting a total environment of action[136] in a form of "a convoluted concourse of juxtaposed, variegated happenings." [137] Rotimi's style of plot construction in these plays was partly informed by the nature of the themes he addressed. For instance, in If Rotimi's main intent was to show "the tragedy of the ruled", and he realized this intent by presenting different "unrelated" incidents of persecution, poverty, prejudice and corruption instead of presenting one single tragic story line. In Hopes, to assert the communal will of the masses, he presented such self-contained incidents as the following: in Act One, Happening II, when Catechist returns from his futile journey to "the outside world", he brings the family of beggars. As Martin Banham explained, this incident contributes to the building of the communal will by showing that "even the poorest and most afflicted can see someone who is even worse than them to be concerned for."[138]

In this chapter we noted the shifts in Rotimi's thematic concerns: he moved his focus from historical themes to socio-political issues; he became politically more explicit and partisan in his writing; he also focused more on providing solutions than reflecting socio-political problems. As was indicated in Rotimi's note to Martin Banham regarding If ("If marks a departure from my earlier directions, and the beginning of a new phase both in style and concern")[139] the change in his thematic concerns was partly a conscious decision. However, this decision was conditioned by three major factors.

The first factor was Nigeria's socio-political circumstances. The oil-boom of the seventies brought glaring social inequities in Nigeria, and as the country's economy fell into the economic crisis of the eighties, the condition of the masses worsened. On the other hand, as the political experiment of the Second Republic got into crisis, the hope for a stable and just political system began to fade. These socio-political problems created favourable conditions for a radical leftist movement to evolve. This movement initially was limited to educational institutions, but it gradually spread to the trade union movement, especially after university academic staffs' associations became members of the trade union.

The second factor that conditioned the shift in Rotimi's thematic focus was the development of Nigerian theatre itself. As was noted in the first chapter, this was the stage in which the second generation of playwrights and critics became influential. Besides, most of this new generation of artists were part of the radical movement. Hence they questioned their predecessors', including Rotimi's, approach toward the problems of the society and attacked them for "lack" of commitment. They also challenged the style of writing of the first generation. The following quotation gives us a hint of the kind of criticism directed at Rotimi at

that time:

> Without question, there may be grounds for impatience, at least until Hopes [of the Living Dead] with Rotimi's rather ambivalent ideological basis in terms of his recurring tendency to vacillate between two irreconcilable polarities: the oppressed and the oppressor; the committed and the bourgeois. True enough, this vacillation gives Rotimi's drama unengaged ambience, a lack of sincerity in his portrayal of the sordid detail of social life, the suffering of his small men and their resolve to triumph over their class enemies.[140]

The third and most important factor was the change in the composition and expectation of the audience. The economic growth of the seventies and the consequent expansion of educational facilities allowed many young Nigerians of working-class and peasant backgrounds to join the elite. And as I pointed out in the first chapter this social group has constituted Rotimi's potential audience. In addition to the bitterness they shared with their parents (who were either members of the working class or the peasantry), this new generation of intellectuals felt angry about their own situation as they were increasingly marginalized by the upper-middle class. Thus, to remain in his constituency, Rotimi had to reflect the bitterness and attitude of this social group.[141] Beyond losing his potential audience, there were other considerations for Rotimi: it was these same people who recommended his plays for text books in high schools.[142] Besides, as Awam Amkpa explained, this social group's taste has been used by publishing houses as the yard-stick of selection of works for print: "institutions like the publishing houses have long realised the taste of such an audience, and do demand literature [sic] that are radical but which do not endanger the existence of the social structures they are bitter against."[143] Although the above-mentioned factors had an immense influence on Rotimi's thematic concern, his shift of focus was not entirely the outcome of these factors. The change in Rotimi's thematic concern should be seen primarily as the inherent development of Rotimi's theatre.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

It is relevant to conclude this study first by summarizing Rotimi's thematic concerns from the beginning of his career until the early eighties. In order to get a complete picture of his thematic journey, I have also included the main issues which Rotimi addressed in his other major plays that were not thoroughly discussed in this study.

Rotimi's earliest major play, Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again, deals with socio-political issues. In this play Rotimi satirized politicians of the First Republic and humorously exposed their misplaced motivations and crudity through the character of Lejoka-Brown and his National Liberation Party colleagues. Rotimi sent a message to the Nigerian electorate to be aware of such political charlatans. In doing so, Rotimi signalled that raising the awareness of the people would be the central focus of his theatre.

In this play, Rotimi interspersed the political theme with such important social issues as polygamy and Women's liberation. Using the crisis of Lejoka-Brown's polygamous marriage, Rotimi showed the incompatibility of this traditional marital institution with modern life. And by letting Lejoka-Brown and Liza's relationship succeed, he advocated a monogamous marriage which transcends educational, religious and cultural differences. Rotimi saw polygamy as one major social institution which subverts women's rights. In regard to women's liberation, he put economic independence and political awareness as its basic factors: as soon as Mama Rashida sees the possibility of financial independence she leaves her husband; Sikira also dares to leave her husband only after Liza affirms for her that she too has rights.

In this play Rotimi showed what women as individuals (Liza) and as collective (Nigerian Market Women's Union) can do in bringing change to the society: Liza disrupts the polygamous relationship between Lejoka-Brown, Mama Rashida and Sikira; the Nigerian Market Women's Union forces the National Liberation Party to drop its ineffective and crude candidate and to adopt a more progressive stand by naming a woman as its candidate.

In Our Husband Rotimi also appraised the cultural dilemma of contemporary society. Almost all characters of this play are caught between the new and old life style. And each one of them is trying to cope with this dilemma in his or her own way: as was shown through his marriage, Lejoka-Brown attempts to embrace the new life style without sacrificing some aspects of traditional life; Liza and the other western-educated characters, on the other hand, give less regard to the traditional way of life; Alhaji Mustafa attempts to defend traditional values at any cost.

In later plays some of the issues addressed in Our Husband are developed along with new ones. In The Gods Are Not to Blame, his adaptation of Oedipus

the King, Rotimi challenged the attempt to put all the blame for Nigerian civil war (and also Africa's post-independence socio-political problem) on foreign forces. He saw ethnic distrust and leadership as the real causes of the civil war. Adding tribal prejudices to Odewale's Oedipal hubris, Rotimi showed how such a person brings misfortune to himself and to his community.

In Kurunmi, his first historical play, Rotimi drew parallels between the 19th century civil war among Yoruba people and the Nigerian civil war. And as in The Gods, he challenged "the Ostrich-like approach post-independent [sic] Nigeria had towards self-inflicted wounds."[144] He showed Nigerians how a split in the political rank of the Oyo Empire and the misguided leadership of Kurunmi doomed their ancestors to gruelling civil war. In this play Rotimi continued to explore the tension between tradition and social changes and treated this issue tragically. Unlike Lejoka-Brown and Alhaji Mustafa in Our Husband, Kurunmi, the traditionalist, stubbornly continues to defend tradition and brings misfortune to himself and to his people.

In Holding Talks, his only non-realistic play, Rotimi turned to a more universal theme and expressed his frustration about the lack of dynamic approach to socio-political problems at the national, continental, and global levels. He also satirized humankind's obsession with discourse and speculation even when faced with catastrophe.

In Ovonramwen Nogbaisi he continued his exploration of historical themes and went beyond appreciation of the past. He re-assessed Nigeria's pre-colonial history and challenged the colonial interpretation of the 1897 British expedition to the Benin kingdom. He also attempted to rehabilitate the image of Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi. He also drew parallels between the economic motive of the 1897 British expedition and the interest of the super-powers in the Nigerian civil war. He appraised the struggle of the present generation against neo-colonial domination by celebrating the resistance of the Benin people against colonial domination. Rotimi's critical intent in The Gods and Kurunmi was replaced with affirmation in Ovonramwen Nogbaisi. He reaffirmed the national identity by celebrating pre-colonial tradition and by attempting to recreate the pageantry of the Benin Kingdom and its religious traditions such as the Ague festival.

In this play, he continued the theme of leadership in a period of crisis. He illustrated the consequences of attempting to rule by instilling fear: the Benin chiefs in their desperation to prove their loyalty to their Oba massacre the British mission, and this brings the down-fall of the Oba and the destruction of his kingdom. Rotimi also showed the Oba attempting to modify his leadership approaches by illustrating him using such tactics as political marriage: the Oba marries his daughter to his Ologbosere to win the latter's loyalty.

In this play, Rotimi dealt with the tragic consequence of the conflict between cultures. He illustrated this with the failure of the Phillips' mission to respect the Benin customs and the misfortune this disregard of others' cultures brought to both British and Benin sides. Rotimi showed that the Oba, like Alhaji Mustafa and Lejoka-Brown in Our Husband and Kurunmi in Kurunmi, is a

traditionalist who is trying to survive in a changing and developing world. Rotimi represented the Oba's dilemma by the physical structure of his palace (the palace roof is made of zinc, "Whiteman's pride" and thatch) and by his action: The Oba forces the elders of Ekpoma, who want social change, to recognize the crowned head of Ekpoma as their leader.

In If Rotimi shifted to the contemporary situation and focussed on showing the plight of the ruled. He returned to one of the central issues of Our Husband: political competition. In If, unlike in Our Husband, he focussed on the electorate and urged them not to cast their votes for a politician "on the basis of sheer fatherhood by birth; or of brotherhood by clan; or sisterhood by religion."(15)

In Hopes of the Living Dead, he allegorically celebrated the struggle of the masses using the historical lepers' uprising in Nigeria at the turn of this century. He illustrated that the victory which had eluded the masses in If is possible. He also developed those factors of social change (ideal leadership, solidarity of the mass and self-reliance) which he laid down in If, and showed them at work. In this play he also reintroduced one of the important issues of his first major play: the issue of the participation of women in leadership.

Three stages are apparent in Rotimi's thematic concern. The first stage coincides with the first civilian rule in Nigeria; and, as was shown above in the summary of Our Husband's themes, it was a period in which Rotimi dealt with contemporary socio-political issues. In the same play we have seen that personal-domestic relationship was also one of the areas of thematic exploration for Rotimi at this stage. Besides the political theme, the major focus in Our Husband is Lejoka-Brown's and his wives' relationships. The play progresses mainly as the result of the crisis and adjustment of this relationship.

The second stage, which is represented by Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, coincides with the civil war and military rule in Nigeria. At this stage Rotimi obliquely addressed the contemporary socio-political crisis. First he used adaptation to comment on the Nigerian civil war: he re-worked the Oedipus' myth in Yoruba terms in The Gods. Then he turned to Nigerian pre-colonial history to comment on the contemporary socio-political situation. He also used this history to define national identity and to strengthen mutual respect between Nigerian ethnic groups: he used the history of the Yoruba people in Kurunmi, the history of Edo (Benin) people in Ovonramwen and the history of Brass people in Akassa Youmi,[145] his unpublished play. Almost all of Rotimi's plays of the second stage focus on appraising society's search for harmony. They show a greater degree of metaphysical dimension than any of his plays of the other two periods: in almost all of these plays of the second period the central characters consult the gods before they take any action; as well, the Oracles at Ile-Ife determine the course of action both in The Gods and Ovonramwen.

The third stage, represented by Hopes, coincides with the second period of civilian rule in Nigeria. Rotimi at this stage returned to socio-political themes. Rotimi's themes of this period reflect his disillusionment with the political system. He focussed on showing the tragedy of the ruled and, as was seen in If and

Hopes, he suggested restructuring the society. Thus, his plays of this period became politically partisan and explicit. Rotimi's themes of the third stage also differ from his themes of the first and the second stages by their romantic nature. In response to the negative mirroring of the society, he strived to represent the ideal. In If he showed ideal cooperation between the neighbours taking shape, and in Hopes he developed this ideal cooperation to bring a positive result and win for the people the "promised land". And at the centre of this cooperation, Rotimi put "utopian model leaders": in If, Papa, and in Hopes, Harcourt Whyte.

When his plays are examined for their themes it becomes evident that every one of Rotimi's major plays has probed the question of leadership from one perspective or another. Rotimi's persistent concern with this theme is a reflection of his society's search for sound leadership, which, as was shown in Chapter One, has been manifested through the incessant alternation of power between the civilian and the military. The development of the leadership theme in Rotimi's plays is a good indicator of the general pattern of thematic evolution of his works. Rotimi's exploration of the leadership theme at the first stage does not show any urgency. His main focus was unmasking a political masquerader. Using domestic situation and laughter, he warned the audience to be aware of political impostors like Lejoka-Brown. At this stage when he sent this message to the audience, he implicitly established the people's power in effecting good leadership; but this issue had to wait until the third stage to be Rotimi's main concern.

Rotimi's search for a hero began at the second stage. At this stage Rotimi portrayed highly virtuous leaders who brought about their downfall by their vices. These characters are not only born leaders but are also closely associated with the spiritual world: Kurunmi in Kurunmi acts as the priest of Ogun (one of the major gods in the Yoruba pantheon), and the Oba in Ovonramwen sees himself as a god-king. The fate of these leaders is the destiny of their subjects. Thus the people in these plays have no alternative except to share the fate of their rulers. Rotimi no longer used domestic situations to explore the leadership theme at this stage. He rather used the crises of Empires: the Kingdom of Kutuje in The Gods, Oyo Empire in Kurunmi and the Benin Kingdom in Ovonramwen. He looked at the leadership theme not only from the political perspective but also from the military angle. Almost all of the major characters in Rotimi's plays of these period are both political leaders and warlords: Kurunmi in Kurunmi is Generalissimo of Yoruba Empire and Lord of Ijaiye; the Benin chiefs in Ovonramwen have military responsibility in addition to their political role. In these plays Rotimi approached the leadership theme not only from an individual perspective but also from its collective aspect. In Kurunmi he illustrated the merits of collective leadership using the practice of consultation at Ibadan court. And in Ovonramwen he illustrated the necessity of a strong leader along with collective leadership: the Benin chiefs, the same as the Ibadan chiefs, hold consultations to discuss their actions but they fail to effect good leadership mainly because they lack a leader like Ibikunle, the Ibadan War General, among themselves.

At the third stage Rotimi shifted from examining institution-centred to people-centred leadership: Papa in If is a "martinet of the neighbourhood" (ii). He is a modern version of the traditional village elder. Harcourt Whyte is also a community leader. Like Papa, he is a leader of the people who shares their suffering. At this third stage Rotimi resolved the tension between his search for a hero and his belief in the power of the people: in Hopes he portrayed the masses producing a hero from their rank. The major change in Rotimi's exploration of the leadership theme is his shift from examining the shortcomings of leaders to the creation of their prototype. In doing so, as was mentioned earlier, he added a romantic dimension to the leadership theme. At this stage Rotimi shifted also his focus from political and military leadership: Papa is a kind of a moral leader, and he assumes the leadership position not by the virtue of his birth or force but by the virtue of his wisdom. The same applies to Harcourt Whyte except that he is an artist/leader.

The above-mentioned stages in Rotimi's thematic concerns coincide with the three phases in Rotimi's search for a technique. At the beginning of his career, Rotimi, like most playwrights of the continent, was faced with the language dilemma: whether to continue to write in the colonial language or to use one of the country's many indigenous languages. He realized that both choices have their own limitations. Thus, in Our Husband he began his experiment to find a technique which enabled him to reach a wider audience and at the same time to communicate his themes in the most efficient ways. At this stage his experiment was limited to using only Pidgin along with literary English.

In The Gods Are not to Blame , the first play in the second stage of Rotimi's thematic journey, his experiment became purposeful and intense in that he made a conscious effort to "temper"[146] literary English itself. In order to achieve this goal he followed two principles: "simplicity in the choice of words";[147] and modification of the English syntax of his dialogue to refelcet the syntax of indigenous languages.[148] He also infused the dialogue with proverbs, allusions and metaphors to create the same kind of poeticism as the traditional African speech. For instance at the beginning of Ovonramwen, before convicting the rebels, the Oba remarks: "Some birds dread water; ducks sleep in it. The same it is with men "(4). King Odewale in The Gods expresses his own fear as a stranger when he learns that the former king of Kutuje was murdered by one of his men: "When crocodiles eat their own eggs, what will they not do to the flesh of a frog?" (23) In addition to this language experiment, as was noted in our discussion of Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, Rotimi used traditional songs, chants, mime, dance and spectacles as other means of communicating his themes.

In If and Hopes, Rotimi's plays of the third stage, his experiments went beyond using pidgin English and tempering literary English. He began to use indigenous languages not as incidental expressive snippets but as sustainable means of dialogue construction. The following dialogue helps to illustrate this point. In this scene from If, Mama Rosa tries to help the Fisherman, whose life is affected by oil exploration around one of Nigerian rivers, get help from Banji, the

lawyer in the neighborhood:

Fisherman: A biim o gboru y mie wa pirii. O mie bari munoso o mie bia-a?

Mama Rosa: He want to beg you to do one ting for am. He say: you go fit?

Banji: What is it?

Mama Rosa: Anie tie?

Fisherman: Wa alagba biari.

Mama Rosa: E say make you give dem gun.

Banji: Give them what?

Mama Rosa: Gun, gun!

Fisherman: O duko ke Komsini pirii mine ini alagba ke wa pirii miete wa inote pulo-ida-ogbome na owuso bari bara.

Mama Rosa: He say tell Gov'ment make Gov'ment give dem gun to fight di Oil Company dem.

.....

Banji: Tell him it is the same Government that has given power to the Oilmen to look for oil in the river (26-27).

Rotimi's use of indigenous languages enabled him to reach a wider audience--for instance a Kalabari person, a pidgin English speaker, and the literate audience could respond to the above scene. In Hopes he extended this possibility by employing as many as fifteen languages. Generally, Rotimi's search for a form (dramatic technique) which best communicates the content (theme) of his plays was a successful one, and the popularity of his plays is a testimony to this success. Femi Osofisan, comparing Wole Soyinka's and Rotimi's dramaturgical techniques and their influence on the responses of the audience to their works, pointed to this popularity:

> In him [Soyinka] is usually seen a wilful capriciousness, or an opaque erudition appropriate to revered genius. The audience meets him with awe and trembling, and go out shaken, nodding with incomprehension. But a playwright like Rotimi is there right at the doorstep to take you in a warm and fraternal embrace: you go out no less shaken, but the burden is of a terrible comprehension.[149]

It is important to understand that the evolution of Rotimi's themes are rooted in his concern for his country. His themes are informed by his socially

functional view of the theatre. They are also a reflection of his pan-Nigerian background and his deep commitment to his society. As has been pointed out, the major factors which contributed to Rotimi's shift of focus at each stage are: socio-political changes, the development of Nigerian theatre, the change in the composition and expectation of the audience, and Rotimi's own progress as a playwright and a theatre practitioner. Rotimi's thematic concern is limited to a certain range but this was primarily a reflection of the cyclic nature of Nigerian/African society's problems, not a reflection of a lack of genius. If Rotimi returned to the issue of a proper use of voting rights in If, he did so because this issue was an urgent problem in African society at that time as it was in the sixties. Rotimi, who is deeply committed to his society, has no choice but to keep on investigating this cycle in order to help his society to break out of this cycle.

POSTSCRIPT

Since Hopes of the Living Dead Rotimi has yet to publish a major play;[150] by comparison, between 1969 and 1979 he wrote and produced at least four major plays. As he indicated in a 1983 interview, his position as Dean of Faculty of Humanities at the University of Port Harcourt was partly responsible for this dramatic decline in his productivity: "I hardly have the energy to write....Try as I might, I found myself as one in a quicksand, being steadily sucked into the abyss of the post."[151] In one of his recent speeches he explained this as one of African writers' major problems:

> ...the African writer cannot make a living from writing full-time. As a result, he is ineluctably compelled to a distracting compromise. He has to take up employment full-time with an establishment. Whereupon, he manages to make the best of his literary calling: part-time.[152]

From recent discussions with Nigerian theatre scholars, I learned that Ola Rotimi has retired from the University and moved from Port Harcourt back to Ile-Ife, to the place where he first established himself as a prominent playwright and theatre director.[153] Most of Rotimi's plays are based on historical facts and require a great deal of time to do the appropriate research; thus, it appears that his early retirement (he is only fifty-five years old) may have been due to a desire to devote himself more fully to his writing.

Although his productivity declined, Rotimi did not stop writing or producing. Thus, it is appropriate to speculate about the possible future thematic trends in Rotimi's theatre. Recently, he revived Ovonramwen[154] and he is planning to re-write Akassa Youmi, his unpublished historical play of the seventies. Describing his ultimate artistic ambition, Rotimi once said: "My ultimate artistic ambition is to *write* a full-length massiveness in music, dance and movement lasting two whole hours and half *directed* by me, mobilizing a 500-man cast....[and then] collapse and die after making my last exit on stage *acting in it*."[155] Rotimi's return to his plays of the seventies suggests his possible return to the kind of themes which he addressed in the second stage, the themes which are larger in scale and less topical.

There are other indicators of the trend in Rotimi's theatre: for example, his 1987 radio play, "Everyone His/her Own Problem". The play is described as the work which "recounts the universal preoccupation of man grappling with personal problems of one kind or another."[156] Another testimony to his return to "universal" themes is Rotimi's staging of Holding Talks,[157] his only non-realistic play. What is important about this production is that the main vehicle of the thematic thrust (the language)[158] of the original play was removed and entirely replaced with non-verbal stage languages such as mime. This suggests both the new direction Rotimi's exploration of theatrical language may take and an emphasis on the directorial aspect of his craft.

Explaining the factors behind this trend needs further research on Nigerian society and the development of its theatre of the past ten years. Nonetheless, it is

possible to make one speculation based on the country's current economic situation and the funding for the revival of Ovonramwen. The economic difficulties of the recent years forced Nigerian playwrights to rely on private funding bodies. Ovonramwen was revived by one of Nigeria's banks, and such funding bodies may not like to see such plays as If and Hopes of the Living Dead on the stage.[159]

Before concluding this study, it is also relevant to point out some of the possible research areas which became apparent during the course of this study. This study can be developed through a comparative study of Rotimi's thematic evolution and the thematic development of other Nigerian/African playwrights. The evolution of the theme of leadership, which is Rotimi's central thematic preoccupation, can also be studied from different perspectives. A comprehensive study of the evolution of Rotimi's dramatic techniques as well as his themes would enable us to understand Rotimi's theatre even better.

ENDNOTES

[1] Hal May and Susan M. Trosky, ed., Contemporary Authors, vol. 124 (Detroit: Gale, 1988) 377.

[2] These articles appeared in the following publications:
Ola Rotimi, "The Drama in African Ritual Display," Nigeria Magazine, 99 (1968).
Ola Rotimi, "Traditional Nigerian Drama," Introduction to Nigerian Literature, ed. Bruce King (London, Evans, 1971).

[3] Yemi Ogunbiyi, "The Performing Arts in Nigerian Culture," Nigerian History and Culture, Richard Olaniyan, ed., (Essex: Longman, 1985) 333.

[4] Martin Banham, "Ola Rotimi: 'Humanity as my Tribesmen'," Modern Drama 33 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1990) 67.

[5] As can be seen in the appended bibliography no book has been written on Rotimi except a recent Ph.D dissertation in Nigeria. Even in this dissertation, as in other critical works on Rotimi, the focus is on the form, not the content(theme) of Rotimi's plays:

Effiok Bassey Uwatt, "Toward the Evolution of a New Nigerian Theatre: A study of Form in the plays of Ola Rotimi," Ph.D. diss., University of Benin, 1988. (This dissertation was mentioned in Chinyere G. Okafor's article on Rotimi; *see* the Bibliography.)

[6] Ola Rotimi, interview, Wanasema: Conversation with African Writers, eds. Don Burness and Mary-Lou Burness (Ohio: Ohio University, 1985) 14.

[7] Gavin Williams with Margaret Kiloh and John Willmer, The Origin of the Nigerian Civil War (Great Britain: The Open University, 1983) 12.

[8] The New Encyclopedia Britannica: Micropedia (Chicago: Encyclopedia, Inc., 1990) 8, 703.

[9] The New Encyclopedia Britannica: Macropedia (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1990) 29, 896.

[10] James Booth, Writers and politics in Nigeria (New York: African Publishing Company, 1981) 23.

[11] C.S. Whitaker, "The Unfinished State of Nigeria," African Politics and Problems in Development, Richard L. Sklar & C.S Whitaker (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publisher, Inc., 1991) 267.

[12] Booth 22.

[13] Whitaker 267.

[14] Williams 12.

[15] Williams 12.

[16] Williams 17.

[17] Williams 12.

[18] Williams 14.

[19] Ladipo Adamolekun, The Fall of The Second Republic (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., 1985) 8-9.

[20] Elizabeth Isichei, A History of Nigeria (New York: Longman, Inc., 1983) 469.

[21] Isichei 468.

[22] Williams 17.

[23] Isichei 471.

[24] Isichei 472.

[25] Williams 35.

[26] News Watch (28 Sep, 1992) 13.

[27] A.A. Akiwowo and Richard Olaniyan, "Social Change and Stability in Contemporary Nigeria,"Nigerian History and Culture ed. Richard Olaniyan (Essex: Longman Group Ltd.; Ikeja, Ibadan, Owerri, Zaria: Longman Nigeria Ltd. 1985) 223.

[28] Isichei 476.

[29] Political Handbook of the World, ed. Arthur Banks (New York: The State University of New York, 1991) 499-500.

[30] Whitaker 268.

[31] Adamolekun 11.

[32] Adamolekun 11.

[33] Political Handbook of the World 500.

[34] Britannica: Macropedia 29, 897.

[35] Britannica: Macropedia 29, 897.

[36] Akiwowo and Olaniyan 229.

[37] Akiwowo and Olaniyan 223.

[38] Isichei 474.

[39] Dr. Awam Amkpa, personal interview, 7 January, 1993.

Awam Amkpa is a Nigerian theatre scholar and practitioner. He currently teaches at Department of Drama, Theatre and Television Studies of King Alfred College in England. This interview took place at University of Alberta during Dr. Amkpa's visit to Edmonton.

[40] Akiwowo and Olaniyan 229.

[41] Akiwowo and Olaniyan 223.

[42] Akiwowo and Olaniyan 225.

[43] Akiwowo and Olaniyan 221.

[44] Wole Soyinka, "Opera Wonyosi" (preface to the rehearsal script) qtd. in James Gibbs, Wole Soyinka (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1986) 131.

[45] Isichei 475.

[46] There are other forms of drama in Nigeria such as the Yoruba travelling theatre. This thesis refers only to the literary drama in English.

[47] Ogunbiyi 329.

[48] Amkpa personal interview.

[49] Olu Obafemi, "The Development of Nigerian Dramatic Literature," Perspectives on Nigerian Literature: 1700 to the present, ed. Yemi Ogunbiyi (Lagos: Guardian Books Ltd., 1988) 1, 56.

[50] Obafemi 56.

[51] Ogunbiyi 333.

[52] Obafemi 57.

[53] Ogunbiyi 334.

[54] Dr. Jide Malomo, personal interview 10 February, 1993.

Dr. Malomo is a professor at the department of Theatre Arts of the University of Ibadan in Nigeria. This interview took place at the Catalyst Theatre in Edmonton during Dr. Malomo's visit to Edmonton.

[55] Ogunbiyi 334-336.

[56] Ola Rotimi, interview, Dem-say: Interviews with Eight Nigerian Writers, ed. Lindfors, Bernth (Austin: University of Texas at Austin, 1974) 66.

[57] Wole Soyinka, interview, Wole Soyinka's The Lion and the Jewel: A Critical View, Martin Banham (London: Rex Colling Ltd., 1989) 27.

[58] Amkpa, personal interview.

[59] Ola Rotimi, Statements: Towards August '83.... (Lagos: Kurunumi Adventures Ltd., 1983) 14.

[60] Rotimi, Statements 15.

[61] Femi Osofisan, qtd. in A Reader's Guide to African Literature, ed. Hans M., Helen and Zell (New York: African Publishing Corporation, 1971) 454.

[62] Rotimi, Dem-say 60.

[63] Amkpa, personal interview.

[64] Rotimi Wanasema 14.

[65] Ola Rotimi, "An Interview (1975) with Ola Rotimi," Lace Occasional Publications, ed. Dapo Adelugba (Ibadan: Department of Theater Arts, 1984) I, 3, 22-23.

[66] Ola Rotimi, Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1977) 41. Further references in the text will be indicated only by page number.

[67] Rotimi, "An Interview (1975) with Ola Rotimi" 21.

[68] Rotimi, "An Interview (1975) with Ola Rotimi" 21.

[69] Elizabeth Isichei, A History of Nigeria (New York: Longman Inc., 1983) 468.

[70] Rotimi, "An Interview (1975) with Ola Rotimi" 21.

[71] Rotimi, "An Interview (1975) with Ola Rotimi" 20.

[72] Rotimi, "An Interview (1975) with Ola Rotimi" 18.

[73] Ola Rotimi, African Dramatic Literature: To Be or To Become? (Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 1991) 6.

[74] Rotimi sets Alhaji Mustafa apart from the other characters. He does not satirize him as he does with other characters. He rather describes him as a "venerable old man (vi)" and in the brief scene in which he presents him he also shows him as a wise man. This suggests Rotimi's great respect for traditional society.

[75] Rotimi, "An Interview (1975) with Ola Rotimi" 20.

[76] At the end of Act One, Scene V Liza and Lejoka-Brown fight over music: Liza listens to Handel's "Halleluyah Chorus" and Lejoka-Brown thinks Handel's music is not "real music". To show Liza the real kind, he plays a Sakara record, but the music is not to her liking and she turns it off.

[77] Alex C. Johnson, "Ola Rotimi: How Significant?" African Literature Today (New York: African Publishing company, 1982) 143.

[78] Rotimi "An Interview (1975) with Ola Rotimi" 26.

[79] Odewale of Kutuje, Oedipus' equivalent in The Gods, unknowingly kills his biological father, King of Kutuje, when the latter insults Odewale's tribe during a confrontation at the place where the "three foot paths meet." As in Oedipus Rex this incident brings misfortune to the people of Kutuje who make Odewale their king after he saves them from the ravages of war. Rotimi emphasized the tribal conflicts throughout the play and made Odewale's tribal prejudices a major tragic flaw in his character. When Odewale learns that the curse which fell upon his people is the consequence of the murder of the former king, he becomes wary of the townspeople, feeling that if they allowed their king (who is from their tribe) to be killed, they will not hesitate to kill him, as he is a "stranger." He also accuses Aderopo (King Adetusa and Queen Ojuola's son, meaning Odewale's own brother) of plotting against him, as the soothsayer who was brought by Aderopo said that Odewale was the murderer. Odewale claims that Aderopo was motivated by tribal prejudice and thirst for power. In this way, Rotimi illustrates that ethnic distrust is the major cause of the tragedy in the play (and also in Nigerian society): Before his final exit, Odewale says: "Do not blame the Gods. Let no one blame the powers. My people, learn from my fall. The powers would have failed if I did not let them use me. They

knew my weakness: the weakness of a man easily moved to the defence of his tribe against others (71)."

[80] Rotimi African Dramatic Literature 21.

[81] Johnson 14.

Kurunmi, the central character of the play by the same name, is Generalissimo of the Yoruba (Oyo) Empire and Lord of Ijaiye, one of the power blocks in the Oyo Empire. He leads his subjects to war, responding to the neglect of tradition in the inheritance of the crown of Oyo. He insists that the Crown prince should not succeed his father but commit suicide on his father's, the king's, death, as was the custom.

Kurunmi is a misguided leader who believes that tradition, like the laws of nature, is immutable: "The gaboon viper dies/ its children take up its habits, poison and all. The plantain dies/ its sapling takes its place/ broad leaves and all..../*That* is the meaning of tradition (15)."

He is also honest; he has nothing against the Crown Prince except that the latter breached tradition. On the other hand, some of the warlords of Ibadan, the other major power block in the empire, support the Prince's ascension to power reflecting on their own advantage. And warlords such as Ogunmola, who is the second highest commander in the Ibadan army, support the new king to take a personal revenge on Kurunmi.

Kurunmi is also a strong-willed leader. At the height of the fight the Egbas, another power block in the Oyo Empire, renege on their promise to fight along with Kurunmi. In the same scene, Kurunmi learns about the death of his sons in action. Despite these setbacks and also his age, Kurunmi continues to fight for what he believes and meets his death heroically.

[82] Rotimi explored the leadership theme from an individual perspective through Kurunmi and other leader-characters. Next to Kurunmi, Ibikunle of Ibadan is the most important leader-character in the play. Rotimi contrasted the conciliatory attributes of Ibikunle with the stubbornness of Kurunmi. He also contrasted Ibikunle's cautious and rational approach to leadership problems with that of his deputy's, Ogunmola's, rash and emotional (vengeful) approach.

Rotimi also presented the merit of collective leadership by contrasting the Ijaiye court with that of Ibadan. The Ijaiye court is dominated by Kurunmi, and it is Kurunmi who is making all the decisions. On the other hand, the Ibadan court is more collective; the warlords mainly reach decision through consultation. The merit of this collective leadership is stressed by the final outcome of the battle: the victory of Ibadan over Ijaiye.

[83] Johnson 143.

[84] Hal May and Susan M. Trotsky, eds. Contemporary Authors, Vol. 124 (Michigan: Gale Research Inc., 1988) 377.

In Holding Talks, Man, the central character of the play, who is also a wealthy looking person, turns each incident into a subject of discourse. When he sees that the Barber's hand is shaking, he does not ask why or does not offer any help. Instead, he calls the Barber and his apprentice to argue with him about whether the Barber's hand is shaking or not. And when the Barber collapses hungry and exhausted, Man continues to argue with the Apprentice about whether the Barber just collapsed or is actually dead. The other characters are also obsessed with talking. For example the policewoman engages in argument with Man over investigative procedure instead of taking the Barber to the hospital.

[85] Chinyere G. Okfar, " Ola Rotimi: The Man, the Playwright, and the Producer on the Nigerian Theatre Scene," World Literature Today, ed. Ivar Ivask, 64 (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, 1990) 27.

[86] Ola Rotimi, "Ola Rotimi Interviewed," New Theatre Magazine, ed. Margaret Folarin, Vol. 12 (Bristol: 1972) 6.

[87] Ola Rotimi, Ovonramwen Nogbaisi: An Historical Tragedy (Oxford University press, 1974) xi. Further reference in the text will be indicated as "Rotimi, Ovonramwen."

[88] The Oni of Ife was the supreme spiritual leader of the people who lived in present-day southern Nigeria.

[89] Robert Home, City of Blood Revisited, (London: Rex Collings, 1982) 45.

[90] Home 50.

[91] Samuel O. Asein, "The Tragic Grandeur of Ovonramwen Nogbaisi," Nigeria Magazine 110-112, 1974: 42.

[92] Robert M. Wren, "Ola Rotimi: A Major New Talent," Africa Report, 18, 5 (1973) 30.

[93] Isichei 474.

[94] Rotimi, "Ola Rotimi Interviewed," 5.

[95] Molomo, personal Interview.

[96] Home 119-20.

[97] Johnson 149.

[98] Asein 44.

[99] Dum Okeke, Studies on Rotimi's Ovonramwen Nogbaisi (Onitsha: Elozona, 1990) 17.

[100] Home 15 & 116.

[101] No less than ten titles are mentioned in the play. As David Home in City Of Blood Revisited remarked, Ovonramwen and the two previous Obas between them created twenty-five new titles (15).

[102] Banham 69.

[103] Rotimi, African Dramatic Literature 21.

[104] Rotimi, African Dramatic Literature 21.

[105] Okeke 27.

[106] Okeke 28.

[107] Michael Etherton, The Development of African Drama (London: Hutchison & Co., 1982) 147.

[108] Etherton 148.

[109] Rotimi Wanasema 14-15.

[110] Ola Rotimi, If (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1983) v.

[111] If's action takes place in the backyards of a multi-tenanted old building in one of the slums in Port Harcourt city. The dwellers of this building are a microcosmic representation of the lower class of the society. Among them there are day laborer (Garuba), clerk (Akpan), prostitute (Bety) and house wives. There are also members of the marginalized intellectual elite such as Hamidu, alias "Che Guevara," and Banji "alias Di law."

The relationship of these characters with their landlord (who is presented as the representative of the affluent class) is one of the play's major focuses. The Landlord uses his control of the dwellers' mean accommodation to force them to cast their vote for him. He raises the rent on some of the tenants and notifies to leave his building those who refuses to vote for him. Rotimi shows this character as a ruthless oppressor. This especially is emphasized near the end of the play: the Landlord gets Garuba, the deaf tenant, beaten and arrested by the police because the latter showed

disrespect to him.

In this play Rotimi's main intent is to present the hardships of the lower classes of the society. He presents loosely connected scenes to reflect these hardships. For instance in Happenings I, he brings in a Fisherman who comes only to ask for legal aid from one of the residents in the neighborhood. This character is related to the rest of the characters only by his desperate situation. He is impoverished as the result of the pollution of the river on which his life has been dependent.

Rotimi' s other main intent in this play is to show the tragic future of Nigerian/African society. In the play, this central idea is summarized by Banji "Di Law." In his obituary to the young gifted resident, Banji says:

> That's Onyema' response, his own answer to a society rife with contradictions. He saw what happened at the party. A rich man brandishing his loathsome power so much so... it provoked even the deaf and the dumb.... Later he again was witness to the consequences of affluence disgraced by the deaf and the dumb. The arrest and brutal manhandling of the common man proved too revolting for his young mind to bear. He must have asked himself one question: does a boy like him, honest and sensitive--does he stands a chance in a nation with no value for the dignity of man? A nation where Money and Position mean every thing? What is the future of our *children*? Indeed *where* is the future of Africa herself? (79-80)

[112] Banham 75.

[113] Rotimi Wanasema 15.

[114] Rotimi, Wanasema 15.

[115] Ola Rotimi, Hopes of the living Dead (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1988) vi. Future reference in the text will be indicated by page number(s) only.

[116] Rotimi, African Dramatic Literature 20.

[117] This is one of the five cardinal attributes of an ideal leader which were listed by Rotimi in his African Dramatic Literature: To be or To Become? The other attributes are: being selfless and committed; being action-bound; being forthright in the pursuit of fairness as in the dispensation of justice; sense of humour. Except for the "sense of Humour", the rest of the attributes apply to Harcourt Whyte's character.

[118] Banham 75.

[119] Rotimi, African Dramatic Literature 21.

Papa, an elderly teacher, is a moral leader. As an educator he produced such highly respected intellectuals such as Professor Tekena Dokubo. In addition to the moral leadership; which he provides to the people he acts as the modern version of a velliage elder. He is a "keeper of the vineyard" (12). He advises the residents how to proceed with the upcoming election. He brings together the neighbours who have been fighting and cursing each other and makes them take collective action against the abusive Landlord.

[120] Rotimi, African Dramatic Literature 20.

[121] Rotimi, African Dramatic Literature 21.

[122] Rotimi, African Dramatic Literature 21.

[123] Niyi Osundare, "Parable of Hope," West Africa, ed. Kaye Whiteman (London: West Africa publishing Company Ltd., October 1985) 2268.

[124] Osundare 2268.

[125] Rotimi, If 31.

[126] Ola Rotimi, STATEMENTS towards August '83... (Lagos: Kurunmi Adventures Ltd., 1983) 10.

[127] Rotimi, STATEMENTS 15.

[128] Rotimi, If 16.

[129] Ola Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame (London: Oxford University Press, 1971) 12.

[130] Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame 13.

[131] Rotimi, If 58.

[132] Rotimi, Wanasema 15.

[133] Osundare 2268.

[134] Banham 75.

[135] Osundare 2268.

[136] Banham 76.

[137] Rotimi, If viii. (He provided almost the same note in Hopes too [x])

[138] Banham 76.

[139] Banham 70.

[140] Kemi-Atanda Ilori, "Ola Rotimi," Perspective on Nigerian Literature: 1700 to the present, ed Yemi Ogunbiyi 2 (Lagos: Gurdian Books Nigeria Limited, 1988) 209.

[141] Amkpa, personal interview.

[142] Amkpa, Personal interview.

[143] Awam Amkpa, "The Crisis of Identity and the Search for Definitions: Towards an Alternative Aesthetics for Drama in Africa," diss., Ahmadu Bello University of Zaria, 1987, 108-109.

[144] Banham 68.

[145] Akassa Youmi narrates the attack by the Brassmen on the British trading outpost in Akassa, present-day south-east Nigeria, in 1895.

[146] Rotimi, African Dramatic Literature 14.

[147] Rotimi, African Dramatic Literature 15.

[148] Rotimi, African Dramatic Literature 15.

[149] Femi Osofisan, "Beyond Translation: A Comparatist Look at Tragic Paradigms and the Dramaturgy of Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi," The Ife Monographs on Literature and Criticism (Ife: 1986) 12.

[150] Rotimi's most recent play mentioned in print is Grip Am (African Literature Association Bulletin, 14.3 (1988) 47.) The play was produced in 1988 at the symposium which was organized to commemorate the playwright's fiftieth birthday.

[151] Rotimi, Wanasema 18.

[152] Rotimi, African Dramatic Literature 7.

[153] Malomo, personal interview.

[154] Malomo, personal interview.

[155] Rotimi, Dem Say 68.

[156] May and Trotsky 378.

[157] Malomo, personal interview.

[158] One of the aspects which distinguishes Holding Talks from Rotimi's other plays is its language usage (its minimal spectacle and few characters [seven] are the other aspects). In this play Rotimi, instead of adapting the language, strived to standardize it, to make it more "English." This deliberate "sophistication" of the language was not only the realization of the main theme but as the playwright himself remarked, it was also a response to his critic who accused him of "mishandling" of the English language in The Gods are not to Blame. (For further reference see: Ola Rotimi, "An Interview (1975) with Ola Rotimi, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of African Studies University of Ife, Ile-Ife," Lace Occasional Publications (For Literature, the Arts, Culture and Education), 1.3 [1984]).

[159] Malomo, personal interview.

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